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Elena Vassilieva

# FEMINISM AND ETERNAL FEMININE: THE CASE OF A HAPPY UNION

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF  
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## INTRODUCTION

Discussing the tensions within the women's rights movement in Russia at the beginning of the century, Linda Edmondson remarked that "the word 'feminist' acquired a pejorative sense early in the women's movement in Russia, and has retained it almost to this day. It seems to have been one foreign word that was not eagerly adopted by the intelligentsia."<sup>1</sup> The infinite amount of mockery and abuse that a pronounced feminist allegiance still invites in contemporary Russia is a problem that can not be solved by any one study of the history of feminism in Russia or Soviet Union, yet at the same time, any such study has to acknowledge the historical depth of the achievement for women's liberation, and, in particular, the diversity and the significant achievements of the movements for education and suffrage.<sup>2</sup> The dramatic changes in the status of woman brought about by the October revolution granted women all the legal and social rights there were to ask for – the right to vote, legal independence from the family, freedom of mobility, etc. albeit in return for the universal duty to work for the state.<sup>3</sup> However, by the end of the 1970s the country officially leading in the emancipation of women produced an unofficial feminist group that announced to a very limited audience that women were suffering in the Soviet Union from many evils, among them, total absence of rights. The problem of women's double burden had been addressed and was still gaining response in the

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<sup>1</sup> L. Edmondson, "Women's rights, civil rights and the debate over citizenship in the 1905 Revolution" in L. Edmondson, ed., *Women and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1992), p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> The most thorough and detailed examples of the literature on Russian feminism are L. Edmondson, *Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1984). R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia. Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> On the tensions between the newly acquired freedoms and the demands laid on women by the Soviet state see M. Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Harvester Wheatsheaf: New York, 1989), pp. 18-59.

official press as will be shown in Chapter V, the underlying concern of those published discussions being family integrity and declining birth rates.

The dozen or so women in this group called *Woman and Russia* produced one issue of the journal of the same title when a split between them occurred resulting in two groups, *Woman and Russia* and *Maria*. The former was headed by Tatyana Mamonova, writer and the most active contributor to the first issue, an enthusiastic supporter of many ideas of the contemporary Western feminism. Expelled from the Soviet Union for their activities in 1980, the authors of both journals continued working in the West. Subsequently Mamonova was warmly welcomed by the Western feminist organizations, while *Maria* took a stance unpalatable both to the Soviet authorities and to most of the Western feminism. Its authors ( Tatyana Goricheva, Yulia Voznesenskaya, Natal'ya Malakhovskaya, Galina Grigor'eva, and others) preached a return to the traditional family ideals which were to find their justification in the religious and spiritual tradition of the Russian people. The freedoms and rights granted by the Soviet legislation were announced to have resulted in a near-catastrophic state of moral deterioration, to which Western feminism could give no solutions; instead the "new Russian feminism" was to be pursued.<sup>4</sup>

The "new Russian feminism" had painfully little new to offer to Russian women – its ideals were obedience to God, spiritual responsibility for the family, and fulfillment in motherhood. Soon *Maria* members disposed of the "feminist" allegiance of their group entirely and preferred to associate themselves with the politically neutral "women's cause" or "women's solidarity".

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<sup>4</sup>G. Grigor'eva, , "K istorii zhenskogo dvizheniya vos'midesyatykh godov", in Dolinin V., Ivanov, B. (eds), *Samizdat* ( NITS "Memorial", SPb, 1993), p. 122.

Why did this commitment attract a prevailing majority within the group as well as the sympathies of fellow dissidents, whereas Mamonova was supported by very few in her country? This work will try to elucidate the content of the "new Russian feminism", i.e. the religious feminism of the *Maria* group, as well as the reasons for its popularity with the Russian intellectuals. The events of the end of 1979 – beginning of 1980, i.e. the publication of both groups' journals, the intervention of the KGB and the subsequent expulsion of the major contributors from the Soviet Union on the eve of the Olympic games, were extensively covered in the West in 1980-1981.<sup>5</sup> However, the entire undertaking was dismissed as a courageous but very short-lived and theoretically obscure attempt at articulating female grievances against the Soviet system and its patriarchal character. While indeed detached from feminist theoretical discussions and largely rooted in experience, *Woman and Russia* was described by one Western publication as the "howl" of Russian women.<sup>6</sup> It is one of the objectives of the present work to demonstrate the roots of the feminist publications, and, especially those of *Maria*, in the intellectual and political concerns of the post-war generations of Russian intellectuals.

One significant reason for discussing *Maria* in the framework of Soviet dissent is the dramatic difference in terms of recognition from unofficial intellectual circles for the two women's publications. In fact, this difference was rooted in *Maria's* adherence to the general process of religious revival that the Russian intelligentsia had been discussing for about a decade by then. In undergoing its religious or religious-national revival, the Soviet dissident movement largely subscribed to the ideas

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<sup>5</sup>See, for instance, A. Holt. "The First Soviet Feminists" in B. Holland, ed. *Soviet Sisterhood* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 237-265; R. Kaiser, "USSR - Soviets Spirit Feminists Out of the Country" in *Washington Post* August 10, 1980.

associated with the critique of Marxism initiated by the *Vekhi* collection (1909) and the "new religious consciousness", exemplified by authors like Nikolai Berdyaev, Vladimir Solov'ev, Simeon Frank, Sergii Bulgakov and Pavel Florenskii. Although the ideas of the beginning of the century and religious nationalism did not necessarily grant a unifying platform, identification with the cause of growing national and religious consciousness was definitely the major intellectual framework for the unofficial circles in the 1970s in Leningrad.

One of the concerns of the Russian post-war nationalism was the deterioration of the family and rural tradition. Thus, *Maria* when speaking of the vital necessity for the woman to return to the family and be appreciated for her role as the preserver of the family echoed one of the urgent issues voiced by both official and unofficial patriots –preservation of Russia and its historical tradition.<sup>7</sup> Full-time employment for women, together with severe infrastructure shortfalls that remained unsolved throughout the era of "developed/high socialism" (in L.Brezhnev's wording), were said to account for the steep and steady decline in the birth rate in the Soviet Union. The Soviet authority's anxiety on the degradation of the Russian nation was reflected, in official discourse, by the studies of the foremost demographer of the time, V. Perevedentsev, and documented by a number of Western authors as well.<sup>8</sup> While not necessarily complying with the pressures of official ideology, *Maria's* authors can be said to have contributed to nationalist rhetoric, supplementing it with the same

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<sup>6</sup>T.Goricheva recalls one reaction among many: "A Western journal...remarked, not without some irony: 'The Russian women are not speaking, they are howling'" in T. Goricheva, *Talking about God is Dangerous* (SCM Press: London, 1986), p. 86.

<sup>7</sup>As will be shown below, the 1970s witnessed a more favourable approach of the Soviet authorities to the national religious discussions. On the centrality of the issue of preservation in the Russian nationalist thought of the 1960s-1970s see J.B. Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1983), pp. 64-87.

<sup>8</sup>Dunlop; H. Smith, *The Russians* (Quadrangle: The New York Times Book Co., 1976).



urgency of spiritual responsibility for Russia's preservation, voiced from the female perspective.

However, the most important feature of *Maria's*, was the identification with the ideas on femininity, sexuality and creativity associated with the turn-of-the-century philosophy in Russia. The set of ideas on the role of femininity in man's creative union with God expounded in the philosophy of Vladimir Solov'ev and Nikolai Berdyaev appear to have exerted most influence on Tatyana Goricheva, the most important thinker of the Maria group. Vl. Solov'ev's theory of attaining immortality embraced ideas of the Eternal Feminine, androgyny and the cult of the Beautiful Lady, which had exerted enormous influence on the culture of the Russian fin-de-siecle.

This essay will show why and how these ideas were appropriated by the "new Russian feminism" and what this suggests to a contemporary student of Russian feminism. In Chapter I I will discuss the work of Vl. Solov'ev and the place of the feminine in his immortality project. Solov'ev's mystical visions of the Beautiful Lady made a great impact on both generations of the Russian Symbolism, and especially on literary figures like A.Blok, A. Belyi and Z. Gippius, in whose biographies Solov'ev's work had life-long consequences.

Chapter II discusses what can be considered the major influence on Goricheva's religious feminism – Nikolai Berdyaev's work on creativity and sexuality. Although Berdyaev himself to a great extent had drawn on Solov'ev's thought as well, it is unmistakably Berdyaev, rather than Solove'ev who was the author most often cited by the dissidents. Although the overall interest of religious national dissent was derected towards Berdyaev's ideas on the relationship of religion and nation, rather than his discussion of the personality transformation, Goricheva's work demonstrates

the influence of Berdyaev's treatment of sexuality and femininity. (In Berdyaev's work, sexuality is split into the force containing the potential for immortality through a creative union with God, and the force responsible for reproduction and therefore, mortality.) Berdyaev's acid criticism of the contemporary feminist movement for, as he believed, was overlooking the genuine feminine mission also explains the attractiveness of his thought for the women who believed that it was emancipation that had enslaved the Russian women. Berdyaev's views were incorporated into the religious nationalist worldview of the 1970s intellectuals, and lent the Soviet dissenters a convenient platform that allowed for criticism of Soviet ideology, and at the same time created an alternative path to egalitarianism, which was believed to be the core of Western feminism.

Chapter III aims at illuminating the feminist potential of the two famous responses to the philosophy of the Eternal Feminine. The lack of similarity between the diverse and rich work of a prominent literary figure, Zinaida Gippius and the only work written by Lyubov' Blok (the daughter of the famous chemist Mendeleev) highlights the difference in the functional positions these two women occupied in the Russian turn-of-the-century culture, i.e. that of the thinker in the case of Gippius and that of the surface onto which fantasies were projected in the case of Blok. The section also demonstrates that Gippius' work yields interesting comparison with the work by T.Goricheva, thus, pointing to the feminist potential of Gippius' ideas despite the author's apparent aversion to the emancipation movement. Thus, the section, above all, demonstrates that with all the three women the feminist agenda arose when each of them attempted to theorize their own sexuality.

Lyubov' Blok's memoirs set out an important historical evidence of the implementation of Solov'ev's cult of the Beautiful Lady in reality. It would certainly

be crude to describe a memoir narrative as an absolute equivalent of Solov'ev's theory. The aim of the chapter, though, is to show the illusory proximity of esoteric philosophical writing with real life possibilities. The abstract character of the Eternal Feminine in Solov'ev's philosophy was underestimated and its content taken at face value with catastrophic results to the personal life of a major Russian poet of the 20th century.

It was the dissatisfaction with the contemporary forms of theorizing this relationship as well as that of the sexes that was at the core of Z. Gippius' philosophical work. The chapter provides a brief analysis of her ideas related to the religious quest for a new union between sexes. Although Z. Gippius' work cannot be directly traced in the texts of the 1970s feminists, it is clear that her philosophical texts pre-figured what Goricheva's had to say on the necessity of redeeming the metaphysical status of transforming the institution of marriage so as to fill it with a genuinely Divine content.

The religious ferment among the young intellectuals in the 1960s-1970s as well as the rise of national consciousness is discussed in Chapter IV. Every commentator on the dissident movement in the USSR has noted the fact that Soviet dissent had never been homogeneous in its articulation of grievances.<sup>9</sup> The present analysis is devoted to elucidating the religious and national contexts, which created the religious feminism of *Maria*. These were the strong anti-Western stance of some official and unofficial publications, emerging Russian nationalism, manifested in a belief of Russia's special spiritual destiny, lack of belief in the democracy sustaining institutions, and an appeal to turn to the Russian rural tradition of the rural

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<sup>9</sup> G.Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union. 1917-1991*. (Fontana Press: London, 1992), Ch. 14, "Religion, Nationality and Dissent", pp. 402- 445; G. Saunders, ed. *Samizdat. Voices of the Soviet*

community. The present analysis shows both the issues discussed by the dissenters and the reflection over these discussions in the *Эмигрант* press. It highlights the activities of the religious-philosophical seminar in Leningrad, the first organization of young people devoted to studying the Church fathers and to the creation of a genuine religious community.

It would be erroneous to regard the dissident movement, or, the second culture, as completely isolated from the official discourse. Most members of the dissident movement were at one time or another involved in the production of the "first" culture, or, ideology, and to assume that their mindset was completely transformed so as to contradict every aspect of the official doctrine is obviously wrong. Thus, in the nationalist rhetoric there is at least temporary consistency with the early Brezhnev government's line.

While part of the agenda of the dissident feminist groups may be best seen through the analysis of the fellow dissidents, it is indispensable to consider the state of the official discussion on the woman question, which at the time was by no means muted. Although incompatible with a number of previous official statements and reports (e.g. 1926 USSR Constitution), the debate on women's rights was re-ignited in the 1970s as part of the major concern over the dissolution of traditional family: ever-rising divorce and ever-falling birth rates, urbanization and the hitherto unheard of "feminization" of men and "masculinization" of men. Chapter V examines the typical instances of the official discourse traced through the Soviet periodicals. These demonstrate a genuine emotional involvement of the authors who related the family dysfunction to the deterioration of national health.

Finally, Chapter VI describes the appearance of *Woman and Russia*, the reactions to it by the "second culture", i.e. the unofficial circles in Leningrad, and the split of the group into two. Most importantly, it attempts to show why *Maria* gained considerably greater approval from the fellow dissidents as well as from émigré figures, like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. It analyses the leader of *Maria*, Tatyana Goricheva's, contribution to *Woman and Russia*, as well as her later work, which jointly demonstrate the involvement with the religious philosophy of the beginning of the century. *Maria*'s criticism of Western feminism was perceived to have originated in tune with the intellectuals' adherence to the overall religious nationalists' mistrust of Western democracy as well as of individualist values. Goricheva's later publications are invoked to show that the statements of the 1979-1980 did not have an accidental character but were developed in a consistent worldview, which deserves analysis in its own right. Although Goricheva's later writing on the spiritual mission of woman continued to rely on Berdyaev's ideas, it implicitly took issue with Berdyaev's negative appraisal of the role of the feminine in the history of Christianity.

## Chapter I. VLADIMIR SOLOV'EV: SOPHIA AND ETERNAL FEMININE.

The originality of the religious feminist thought of the 1970s as well as its indebtedness to the philosophy and culture of the Silver Age stands out most clearly in the question of the mystical vocation of femininity. Although there is considerable similarity in the ideas of T.Goricheva and N.Berdyayev on the role and mission of the feminine in the society and culture, it would be a mistake to speak of the direct influence or adoption of the ideas of the philosopher who was most venerated by the Russian intelligentsia of the second half of the twentieth century. For the most part, Berdyayev's ideas (like those of many others at the beginning of the 20th century) on the role of the feminine in the project of the new utopia were themselves secondary, to a large extent drawing on Vladimir Solov'ev's concepts, especially those of Sophia and the Eternal Feminine. This chapter is an attempt at clarifying the reasons for the confusion of these two categories, i.e. Sophia and the Eternal Feminine, constituents of different, although not quite distinct, projects of Solov'ev's thought. The founding member of *Maria* group, Tatyana Goricheva, refers to Solov'ev's concept of Eternal Femininity as "extremely important, ambiguous and almost tragic for the Russian consciousness" (soznanie).<sup>10</sup> Although Goricheva does not define the ways in which the Eternal Femininity could affect the fate of the nation, at least part of the tragic intensity of this category comes from the rather dramatic consequences for the individual women who were assumed, or assumed themselves, to incarnate the Feminine in this world. Although V.I. Solov'ev strove to differentiate the two, it appears that his legacy stood out to the contemporaries as not devoid of the dubious

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<sup>10</sup> T. Goricheva, "Vechnaya zhenstvennost' v poezii Vladimira Solov'eva" in T.Goricheva, ed., *Russkaya zhenshchina i pravoslavie*. (Spb: 1996), p. 159.

image of the Divinity and material woman.<sup>11</sup>

VI. Solov'ev's later work, ""The Meaning of Love"" (1892-1894) espoused a view of femininity as the ray of Divinity that shined onto the human and led him to a more perfect union with God, and according to which the Eternal Feminine was the way to androgyny. However, his earlier work, *La Russie et l'Eglise Universelle*, had laid down the foundations of the existence of godman, who was to combine the instinct of woman and the reason of man as well as the reflection of a perfect society, The result was a god-like creature, Sophia - the outcome of the evolutionary process of communication between God and humanity. Sophia's only incarnation to have appeared on earth in the history of humanity was Jesus Christ (v.11: 308).<sup>12</sup> At the same time, as the literary documents of the Russian symbolist milieu suggest, Sophia was largely understood as the divine incarnation of the Eternal Feminine:

"By disclosing her image further and further, she works through the gaze of the loving woman; the relationship between a man and a woman is a symbol of another relationship, that of Christ and Sophia. Man rescues the fallen aspect of Sophia by the strength of his logic..."

("Обнаруживая все более и более миру свой лик, она действительно действует взором нас любящей женщины; отношения мужчины и женщины - символ иных отношений: Христа и Софии. Мужчина логической силою освобождает павшее начало Софии...")<sup>13</sup>

This interpretation of Solov'ev's ideas on femininity betrays a merging of the two concepts, i.e. that of the Eternal Feminine and of Sophia. It also suggests that it

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<sup>11</sup>On the history of perception of two aspects of Sophia as the saintly virgin and the earthly mother, see M.Epstein, "Daniil Andreev and the Mysticism of Femininity" in B.G.Rosenthal, *The Occult in the Russian and Soviet Culture*. (Cornell Univeristy Press: Ithaca and London, 1997), pp. 325-355.

<sup>12</sup>Sobranie sochinenii V.S. Solov'eva, v. 11 (Brussels, 1966), p. 308.

<sup>13</sup>A. Belyi, *Vospominaniya o Bloke* (Moskva: Respublika, 1995), p. 32.

originated outside the bulk of Solov'ev's philosophy, primarily from biographical facts, Solov'ev's poetry, and from the examination of Solov'ev's manuscripts. Moreover, the elusiveness and dubiousness of the interpretation thus born might have added a certain erotic flare to ideas that were primarily about the relationship of man with God. Ever since the Symbolists appropriated the Eternal Friend, she became a plastic entity cut to suit the whims of the volatile genius. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the popularity as well as longevity of Solov'ev's ideas on the Eternal Feminine owe at least as much to the life practices of the Russian symbolists, as to the philosopher's series of articles "The Meaning of Love" (1892-94).

The attempt at a spiritualization of a sexual union made by Vl. Solov'ev in "The Meaning of Love is nothing more than a project of sanctifying the sexual relationship by bringing it within the process of achieving a godlike androgynous creature. However, even a very brief acquaintance with the biographies of the major symbolist poets and religious philosophers of the time suggests much more ambivalent perceptions of this article, as well as raising the question of possible misreading.

When the circle of young 'Solov'ev-followers' (A. Belyi, S. Solov'ev, A. Blok, and others)<sup>14</sup> desired to see the 'radiant light of Divinity' in the women they were in love with at that moment, the succession of incarnations of the Eternal Feminine appeared. Although probably amusing for those outside the esoteric circle, there was little in that myth-creating process that was sacrilegious or vicious. However, it was when the claims to the highest throne, that of the status of Sophia, the Divine Wisdom, arose that the myth-creating game became insulting to many. When Anna Shmidt, a poor and eccentric reporter from Nizhnii Novgorod, approached A. Blok, G. Chulkov, A. Belyi and S. Solov'ev in turn, Solov'ev's family started fearing dangerous



consequences of misinterpretation of the philosopher's work.<sup>15</sup>

Although it may appear striking to the reader of Solov'ev's philosophy that Sophia could be misappropriated as an elaborate public persona for the real life women, the possibilities of identification with Sophia transpire from Solov'ev's famous poem "Three Meetings" (1898), where the yearning of the poet for the Eternal Friend bears both ideal and sensual traits. Another powerful impression, according to A. Belyi, was imprinted on the minds of the Solov'ev-followers, when the late philosopher's manuscripts revealed a mysterious 'correspondence' jotted down on the margins and signed as "S" or "Sophie". Although formally not part of Solov'ev's legacy, his "communication" with Sophia, where the latter displayed features not uncharacteristic of real women, now opened up the question of the incarnation of Sophia in an earthly woman. It is not an aim of this essay to try and answer the question of why this merging of the object of the ideal love, the Eternal Feminine, and the outcome of the man's union with God, Sophia, occurred, if only in name. One of the possible explanations is the connection to Sophia Petrovna Khitrovo for whom the philosopher had deep unrequited love, and it could well be her with whom the spiritual connection was attempted.

The five articles of "The Meaning of Love" one by one define the essence, meaning and task of "sexual love", seen as the medium for achieving the perfect humankind, set on defeating mortality. Solov'ev argues that death can be only overcome by the sexual love that, in his view, is the highest form of love. It is privileged over maternal love since the latter arises from the instinct of the preservation of the species, and therefore does not transcend the animal instinct. Nor

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid, p.33.

does it call for the abandonment of one's egotism, as the sexual love does, since its prerequisite is the unequivocal recognition of the other person's uniqueness and individuality.

Nonetheless, the perfect union between the sexes, shown as the superior kind of love, would ideally remain unconsummated:

"If the entire meaning of love is procreation and if a superior force governs love affairs, then why should it, instead of striving to unite those who love each other, on the contrary, as if on purpose, impede that union, as if its task were to take away by all means at its disposal, the very possibility of procreation for genuine lovers...[love] by any means...drives them to an untimely childless death."

("Если весь смысл любви в потомстве и высшая сила управляет любовными делами, то почему же вместо того, чтобы стараться о соединении любящих, она, напротив, как будто нарочно препятствует этому соединению, как будто её задача именно в том, что бы во что бы то ни стало отнять самую возможность потомства у истинных любовников... [любовь] всякими... способами доводит их до безвременной и бездетной кончины".)<sup>15</sup>

Thus, procreation is seen as an impediment for the immortality that is to be achieved through the restoration of the original androgynous wholeness. While overcoming egotism is seen as the meaning of love, restoring androgyny is its ultimate task:

"The task of love is to justify in reality that meaning of love which initially is only given in feeling; it takes such a combination of two given limited creatures which would create out of them one absolute ideal personality. ... in order to get filled with absolute content ... the very human form has to be restored in its wholeness..."

("Задача любви состоит в том, чтобы оправдать на деле тот самый смысл любви, который сначала дан только в чувстве; требуется такое сочетание двух данных ограниченных существ, которое создало бы из них одну абсолютную идеальную личность... Чтобы наполниться абсолютным содержанием ... сама человеческая форма должна быть восстановлена в своей целостности...") (ML: 24).

Although Sophia is not mentioned in "The Meaning of Love", it has been argued that Solov'ev's phenomenology of love is a logical outcome and a development of his sophiology.<sup>17</sup> However, in this text Solov'ev seems to have made a remarkable

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<sup>15</sup> S.Cioran, *Vladimir Solov'ev and the Knighthood of the Divine Sophia* (Waterloo: Wilfrid University Press, 1977), pp.83-85.

<sup>16</sup> Vl. Solov'ev, ""The Meaning of Love"" in *Sobranie sochinenii V.S. Solov'eva* in 12 vols. (Brussels, 1966), vol.7, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel D. Cioran, pp. 35-41.

attempt to draw parallels between the feminine principle in general and the real woman. As in the previously discussed works, Solov'ev defines the eternal feminine as that "other unity, different though inseparable from the initial divine unity" but "in relation to God a passive [one ... that] perceives the fullness of the divine life." (ML: 24). For the first time, its correlative, the real woman, is made prominent:

"...the transformation of an individual female creature into a ray of eternal Divine femininity, inseparable from its radiant source, will be the genuine..., objective reunion of an individual human with God, the restoration in him of the live and immortal image of God."

("...превращение индивидуального женского существа в неотделимый от своего лучезарного источника луч вечной Божественной женственности, будет действительным..., объективным воссоединением индивидуального человека с Богом, восстановлением в нем живого и бессмертного образа Божия.") (ML: 45-46).

In other words, for a man to achieve his union with God (for the subject under the guise of 'human' is male) it is necessary that the woman be devoid of materiality.

However, Blok never quite managed to distinguish the ideal from the sensual, and, as one commentator summed up the potential of this unclear distinction, "this fateful duality concealed a danger of derangement, counterfeits and distortions."<sup>18</sup> The apparition and multiplication of the Beautiful Ladies, such as Lyubov' Blok, Anna Shmidt and other minor figures that occupied the minds of the enamoured poets prove the dangerously seductive potential of Solov'ev's work. According to N. Berdyaev even Christianity was contaminated by the worship of the corporeal, and instead of the Divine Wisdom indulged in veneration of the earthly woman.<sup>19</sup> The cult of the Eternal Femininity, as he pointed out in *The Meaning of Creative Act*, still retained the qualities of female divinity worship, and the pure cult of the Virgin Mary was often mixed with the idealization of Eve, the woman.<sup>20</sup> Berdyaev strove to show the abyss gaping between Sophia and the real woman. He opposed the wholeness of the maiden,

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<sup>18</sup> K. Mochul'sky, *Aleksandr Blok*, transl. By Doris V. Johnson (Wayne State University Press: Detroit, 1983), p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, *Smysl Tvorchestva* (YMCA-Press: Paris, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p.224.

"a viceless chastity" that "appears as the divine image and a Trinity image"<sup>21</sup> and Eve who is exactly the outcome of the loss of androgynous wholeness, while the reflex of Sophia in a human being originates from that ideal state of androgyny.<sup>22</sup> Thus, for Berdyaev the cult of the pure maiden, carried to the extreme, would lead to the cult of the androgynous being, whilst in reality, he insists, the cult of the Eternal Femininity still exists within the vision of the human in which the feminine part separated and opposed itself to the human.<sup>23</sup> The shortcoming of the real Christianity, is that of contamination of the pure feminine side of the Divinity by the earthly woman.

There are a number of reasons for the influence of the world view that Solov'ev propounded. Most importantly, it raised the question of the rationale for sexuality, an issue that most European fin-de-siecle cultures felt a need to address. It did so through the concept of restoring spiritual androgyny, a form of fusion that avoided the sexual encounter and therefore procreation. In the West, as Eric Naiman has argued, the discourse of birth control stemmed from rationalization of passion, a project that established itself in Russia only after the 1905 revolution.<sup>24</sup> Earlier, the conquest of nature was heralded by the call to renounce procreation through the elimination of the woman as an undifferentiated sexual field identified with flesh. Thus, to "consecrate the flesh" it was necessary to redefine the feminine, to see it as comprising two aspects, i.e. the abhorrent reality of the matter and the Eternal Femininity interpreted as the passive unity of pure potential.

However, one should bear in mind that this vicious split does not originate in Solov'ev's philosophy and was rather deduced from biographical facts, his influential mystical poetry and the evidence of his occult practice. As has been shown, Sophia of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.222.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.222.

La Russie l'Eglise Universelle represents the epitome of the relationship between God and humanity, the highest form of the manifestation of God's presence and love, the manifest absolut. The Eternal Feminine is the divine power that reaches out to the human in his striving toward God which is carried out through the sexual love seen as a means for the restoration of androgyny.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.224.

<sup>24</sup> E. Naiman, *Sex in Public* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1997), p.30.

## **Chapter II. IMMORTALITY THROUGH CREATIVITY: SHAKING OFF THE CURSE OF SEXUALITY.**

In his semi-autobiography *Samopoznanie*, N. Berdyaev, probably the most influential Russian philosopher of the 20th century, noted his international fame, regretting that Russia remained the only country where he was almost unknown. This fact, Berdyaev believed, was "one of the indicators of the rupture that the Russian cultural tradition had undergone." ("это один из показателей перерыва традиции русской культуры ")<sup>25</sup>

This assessment was unduly pessimistic: Berdyaev may have remained unknown to the general public until the end of 1980s, when millions gained access to his work, but the philosopher's worldview was already an important presence in dissident thought by the 1970s. Although this was true of a predominantly intellectual elite, Berdyaev's ideas could be seen as crucial for the rise of what had acquired the name of "a new religious renaissance" of the 1970s. More specifically, the underground feminist club, *Maria*, utilized Berdyaev's mystical ideas to help formulate their own rejection of the Soviet version of equality for all.

Berdyaev's presence in feminist thought may seem both justified and unexpected, given the ambivalence of his attitude to women, to feminism and to the female principle. His ambiguous stance on sexuality was the root of the apparent ambivalence of his thought: in no other Russian philosopher, with the exception of Rozanov, is sexuality given so much prominence; nowhere is it treated as such a central existential force:

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<sup>25</sup> N. Berdyaev, *Samopoznanie* (YMCA-Press: Paris, 1980), p. 364.

"Sexuality determines man's perception of the world. Sexuality is the source of being; sexual polarity is the basis of creativity. [...] Man's sexuality reveals the metaphysical roots of his existence... There is no getting away from sexuality."

("От пола зависит мироощущение человека. Пол-источник бытия; половая полярность - основа творения. [...] В сексуальности человека узнаются метафизические корни его существа... От пола никуда не уйти".)<sup>26</sup>

At the same time the sex act and its direct consequence, childbirth, were scorned by Berdyaev for the "bad infinity" of reproduction they generate: creation of new human beings by physical means condemned the future generations to mortality:

"Sexual love fragments the individual, it aspires to the immortality of rod (extended family), to the creation of many imperfect creatures instead of a single perfect one, to bad infinity and eternal repetition."

("...Половая любовь дробит индивидуальность, стремится к бессмертию рода, к созданию многих несовершенных существ, а не одного совершенного существа, к плохой бесконечности, к вечному возвращению.")<sup>27</sup>

As this essay will show, while using the same word, *пол* [sex], Berdyaev speaks of two diametrically opposed forces: sexuality, or, Eros and sex, as a force conducive to the sex act. This split of sexuality into two forces, evident from the context and supported by the opposition of the two historical forces, *личность* [personality] and *род* [kinship, clan], becomes instrumental in the programme of immortality that, in Berdyaev's philosophy, is paved by creativity. No less ambivalent are Berdyaev's views on religion and the place of women in it, as well as on the cult of Eternal Femininity and the worship of real women, which will be discussed in detail below.

Similarly ambivalent are the ideas of dissident feminists in the 1970s whose religious feminism was articulated as an alternative to what was seen as the egalitarian feminist discourse of the West. The main assumption about the latter was that egalitarian feminism had always aimed at imitating men, ignoring women's special status in relation to their reproductive sexuality and therefore, offered women little

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<sup>26</sup> N. Berdyaev, *Smysl tvorchestva* (YMCA-Press: Paris, 1980), p.216-217.

more than Soviet legislation already did. The defects of egalitarianism, they believed, could only be countered with a more profound worldview that relied on existentialist philosophy for support. Reinforced by the absence of creative freedom under the Soviet regime, dissent focused on the problem of personal creativity and its expression. Thus, Berdyaev's philosophy, with its analysis of the complex relationship of sexuality and creativity, offered religious existentialism as a convenient platform for the newly born indigenous feminism. Critical of the Soviet ideology, Berdyaev's views with their Slavophile stance also allowed for a formulation of a worldview alternative to the one offered by Western feminism of the period.

Like many within the 'new religious consciousness', Berdyaev focused on the problem of individual immortality; one that he thought could be solved within the relationship of sexuality and creativity. Since sexuality in the Christian world has been under the jurisdiction of the Church, he felt, consecration of flesh is primarily a religious issue. (The historical treatment of sexuality came under scrutiny elsewhere within the 'new religious consciousness' too: Merezhkovsky denounced 'historical Christianity' and lay high hopes on a Third Testament based on 'consecrated flesh', whilst Rozanov accused the New Testament of stifling the true spirit of sexuality and preached a kind of theist neo-paganism with heavy emphasis on propagation. All these thinkers were influenced by and in fact were heavily dependent on the same sources, i.e. Vl. Solov'ev, O. Weininger, Plato.)

Fundamental for Berdyaev's views was the distinction into *род* and *личность*, seen as opposing forces. Implicitly Berdyaev turned against the idea of sobornost' with its dissolution of an individual in the collective body, where the Slavophile emphasis

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<sup>27</sup> N. Berdyaev, "Novoe religioznoe soznanie i obshchestvennost' " in *Eros i lichnost'. Filosofiya pola i lyubvi*. (M: Prometei, 1989), p.21. Further referred to as NRSO.



on the community and its role superseded the potential achievements of a creative personality. In Berdyaev's view, it was exactly the personality (*личность*) and the individual in his difference from the rest of the community, or, family in a broader sense (*род*) that could become a bridge to immortality. Related to this distinction was Berdyaev's dissatisfaction with the way Christianity had treated sexuality; in his view, it had abandoned its genuine mission of attaining immortality. Instead it yielded to the urge of *род* and so became instrumental in establishing the institution of family:

"The so-called Christian family is a hypocritical lie, a pagan compromise, just like the Christian state is."

("Так называемая христианская семья есть лицемерная ложь, языческий компромисс, подобный христианскому государству.") (NRSO: 21)

Apart from repressing sexuality outside the family, Christianity had legitimized an imperfect version of sexual relations within the family, with detrimental consequences for the individual. This, in Berdyaev's view, contradicted the true spirit of Christianity, since

"...Christ came into the world to conquer death, and, consequently, birth as well, to place the individual in eternity, and thus, to reject the split of the individual in the perpetuation of the family in time."

("...Христос приходил в мир победить смерть, а следовательно и рождение, утвердить индивидуальность в вечности, а следовательно отвергнуть дробление индивидуальности в продолжении рода во времени.") (NRSO, 31)

Thus, Christianity, contrary to the Old Testament, should naturally be opposed to procreation, which is seen as ultimately leading to death. At first glance this supports Rozanov's critique of the Christian anti-sexuality bias. (NRSO, 21) However, Berdyaev never came to share Rozanov's verdict that Christianity was the religion of death, instead feeling that it was exactly the tragedy of the degenerated sexuality of the Antique world that necessitated the coming of Christ. The Church, though,

misinterpreted Christ's coming, failing to encompass the significance of Eros and its potential for the transformation of flesh. (NRSO, 29)

The demand that flesh be transformed or consecrated runs through Berdyaev's work; it is almost as important a theme, as it is in Merezhkovsky's or Gippius's writings. Flesh in its present form, by means of the voluptuous sex act, is subordinated to the impersonal element of *под*, where it produces nothing but "bad infinity" (*дурная бесконечность*). (NRSO, 23)<sup>28</sup> Sexuality in the metaphysical sense, or, Eros, that is accorded a high existential status in Berdyaev's works, is at the same time strictly distinguished from earthly sex, the human reproductive function. The opposition of the sexuality to come and the existing sex is brought into life as the parallel conflict of *личность* and *под*. This curse of sex, reducing the individual to an impersonal particle in the turmoil of *под* cannot be escaped through asceticism: sex can only be overcome and transformed through its relationship with creativity. Christianity at present does not provide the opportunity for a genuine religious experience:

"A true religious mystical life is always orgiastic, while orgasm, a powerful life force is related to sexual polarity."

("...Настоящая религиозная, мистическая жизнь всегда оргиастична, а оргазм, могучая сила жизни, связан с половой полярностью.")<sup>29</sup>

Thus, religion should incorporate sexuality so as to give space for its transcendental relationship with creativity; sexuality redefined and consecrated will make religion a true source of individual immortality. Until then immortality is only granted to *под*, which results in the "false cult of the future" and "pseudo-

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<sup>28</sup> N. Berdyaev, "Pis'mo buduschei zhene L. Yu. Rapp" in *Eros i lichnost'*, p. 23.

Although the expression 'bad infinity' is often ascribed to Solov'ev, Berdyaev notes that it goes back to Hegel.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.16.

progressivism".<sup>30</sup> Although he never openly acknowledged this, Berdyaev comes close to Fedorov's appeal to turn humanity's scientific search toward the past, not the future. Solov'ev's influence is both more pronounced and recognized. Berdyaev sees the ideas of "The Meaning of Love" as a break from Solov'ev's sophiology, but nonetheless approves of Solov'ev's manifesto of individual immortality that, in Berdyaev's view, also reveals the conflict between individual immortality and the interests of *род*. Apart from its programme of immortality, "The Meaning of Love" implicitly offers a programme of "the individual's victory over the impersonal element of the family, and, in this sense, victory over sex." ("...победа личности над безликой родовой стихией, в этом смысле над полом.")<sup>31</sup>

Thus, Eros goes through a transformation within Christianity, from an impersonal principle of love for the beautiful to a personal love for an individual. Christian Eros defeats universal sex, the individual defeats death.

Berdyaev's project of attaining individual immortality relies on the polarisation of the feminine and masculine principles, which in his opinion, is "the basic law of life".<sup>32</sup> Not immediately defined, the masculine and feminine are at a later point associated with activity and passivity respectively: "Sexual split permeates everything. Even cognition contains the principles of male activity and female passivity" ("Разрез пола есть во всем. И в познании есть начало мужской активности и женской пассивности.")<sup>33</sup>

Like many of his contemporaries, Berdyaev goes back to Plato's theory of the lost androgynous self, combining it with the biblical interpretation of the fall. The inevitability of sexual split forever marks the loss of wholeness and harmony. The

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<sup>30</sup> N. Berdyaev, in *Eros i lichnost'*, p.23.

<sup>31</sup> N. Berdyaev, *Eros i Lichnost'*, p. 140.

restoration of the whole would naturally demand a union of the two complementary halves, man and woman, whose most obvious form would be sexual union. So as not to remain dependent on flesh that still remains unconsecrated and, therefore, not legitimized for any transcendent activities, Berdyaev emphasizes sexual polarization beyond the corporeal limits: "I believe that not only flesh has a sex, but the human spirit as well; that the sex of the spiritual individual, symbolized in flesh, does not merely exist in this world but in other worlds, too." ("Я думаю, что не только плоть, но и человеческий дух имеет свой пол, что половой характер духовной индивидуальности, символизирующийся в плоти, существует не только в этом мире, но и в других мирах.")<sup>34</sup>

This metaphysical polarity is perceptible in Berdyaev's views of the cult of Eternal Femininity, a theory that believes in the feminine nature of the World Soul. Thus the cult of Eternal Femininity is a way of expressing one's love for God that allows one to transcend human physical state:

"The chivalrous worship of the Beautiful Lady as well as the love for Virgin Mary restores the personality in its supernatural and supra-natural state"

("В рыцарском культе Прекрасной Дамы, в любви к Деве Марии восстает личность в своей сверхприродной и внеприродной сущности.") (NRSO, 32)

The only corporeal embodiment of the Eternal Femininity that Berdyaev allows to mediate man's interactions with God is the Beautiful Lady, the object of the medieval knight's worship. The cult of the Beautiful Lady grows out of the medieval worship of Madonna, the religious foundation of man's love, love for the "real image of Divine power" ("к конкретному образу Божественной силы") (NRSO, 32)

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<sup>32</sup>N. Berdyaev, "Pis'mo L. Yu. Rapp", p.16.

<sup>33</sup> N.Berdyaev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 218.

The Beautiful Lady, however, just as in the poems of Aleksandr Blok, remains capitalised and abstract, comfortably detached from the author by several centuries. Indeed, pre-Renaissance woman has the best chances of escaping corporeality, wrapped in the fantasies of troubadours, whose poetry Berdyaev held in high respect. Regrettably, apart from the fantasies of creative men, the real woman never comes quite as near to "the image of Divine power":

"There is always a lack of equivalence with the ideal female image. The image of the female beauty is often a deception"

("И всегда есть несоответствие с идеальным женским образом. Образ женской красоты часто бывает обманом".)<sup>35</sup>

This painful disillusion takes place because "women have an extraordinary ability to generate illusions, not to be what they really are". ("У женщин необыкновенная способность порождать иллюзии, быть не такими, каковы они на самом деле.")<sup>36</sup>

Berdyaev does not blame women for being so "deceitful" (*лживый*) seeing this as an acquired habit, a survival strategy that women had to resort to in the course of history. Women should be given more freedom because patriarchy with its constraints forces women to turn to their sexuality for power. Thus, it is the female sexuality dominating the culture that Berdyaev refers to in his indignation with the power of sex:

"Slavery to sexuality is related to the power of the female principle over the human life. The woman is extraordinarily prone to slavery and at the same time she is prone to enslaving others. Sexuality is dispersed in the male, while it makes up the whole of the female nature."

("Рабство пола связано с властью женского начала над человеческой жизнью. Женщина необыкновенно склонна к рабству и, вместе с тем, склонна поработать. Пол в мужской природе частичен, пол в женской природе целостен").<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> N. Berdyaev, "O rabstve i svobode cheloveka", p.140.

<sup>35</sup> N. Berdyaev, "Razmyshleniya ob Erose" in *Eros i lichnost'*, p. 139.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.139

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 128.

Thus, the woman so far an undifferentiated sexual being, should be liberated inasmuch as this process of liberation will free her from her own sexuality, equally dangerous for herself and for others. But, though initially he was uneasy with female sexuality, Berdyaev did speak up on behalf of women's rights in the family and came to share many feminist concerns. For example, N. Chernyshevsky's feminist *What Is to Be Done?*, dismissed in most respects by Berdyaev, gained his praise inasmuch as it supported women's rights within marriage, e.g. the right to the choice of partner and to divorce.<sup>38</sup>

The ideology of marriage was severely criticised by Berdyaev for having served as a hypocritical rationale for what had been primarily an economic strategy. He to a certain extent sympathised with feminist outrage against marriage, acknowledging that it had always been based on economic necessity and had often been imposed on women by force.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the subordination of women was perpetuated in marriage, unfailingly reproducing the perverted relationship of property and sexuality. Appropriated by the institution of marriage, legitimized marital sexuality gave rise to the accumulation of private property, and, therefore, should be guarded against by society. In this analysis of marriage Berdyaev comes close to a modern feminist critique of marriage, but with one fundamental distinction: whereas many feminists see the oppression of women as rooted in sexuality, Berdyaev believed that women were immersed in their sexuality exactly because of their lack of rights within marriage. Thus, it was not the nature of oppression that stemmed from

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<sup>38</sup> N. Berdyaev, "Razmyshleniya ob Eroze", p. 138.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.132.

women's sexuality, rather, the nature of their sexuality was the direct outcome of the historical experience of oppression.

Berdyayev believed that the woman question was essentially a mystical, not a socio-economic one. The woman question should in fact be reformulated as a sexual one, metaphysical in essence, though its socio-economic background was context-dependent. (NRSO, 34) Political theories linking the woman question to the problem of social egalitarianism (e.g. those of the social-democrats) were founded on the premise that man in his present state was an integral personality (*полная личность*), and that woman should become equal to and like a man. Since sexual polarity was crucial for Berdyayev's theory, he could not allow for man and woman to become alike, because it was the union of the two that carried the potential of the whole integral individual. Demanding equal rights was thus, for him, a mere futile attempt to imitate something as imperfect and sub-human as the woman herself, i.e. man. In this sense, the emancipation movement went against the meaning of love, amounting to nothing more than an illusion of equality. (34)

Berdyayev found the emancipation movement denigrating for woman, because it suggested that to become human woman should copy man. To subscribe to this kind of emancipation would mean to conform implicitly to the idea that "femininity was a weakness, backwardness, lack of individuality, and servitude." ("[признание] женственности слабостью, недоразвитостью, безличностью и порабощением.") (35)

Woman was not inferior; in fact, she was probably even superior to man, since her mission was equally great to that of man, although as yet unrecognised. The emancipation movement had rejected this special higher mission and instead had endowed woman with a male attribute – spectacles – since her eyes could not handle

what they are not meant for. (36) The traditional patriarchal view seeing woman's role mainly as child bearing and rearing, on the other hand, recognised woman's uniqueness as well as that of her mission, although it did deny her a personality. For all the reactionary potential of his beliefs, in some ways, Berdyaev prefigured the feminism of difference with its emphasis on the reproductive rights of women.

Berdyaev remained ambivalent on this issue as well: on the one hand, woman should not be emancipated and become man-like; on the other, she should not remain immersed in her sexuality and her reproductive function. Her true mission, in Berdyaev's view, was exemplification of femininity in a metaphysical sense, a crucial source for the creative process:

"Not as an amazon who worships the feminine as superior and competing with the masculine, should the woman come into the world, not as a sexless mediocre creature devoid of individuality, and not as a female, who possesses the strength of sex, but as the image of the eternal feminine, whose mission is to unite the masculine strength with Divinity."

("Не амазонкой, обоготворяющей женское начало, как высшее и конкурирующее с началом мужским, должна войти женщина в мир, не бесполой посредственностью, лишенной своей индивидуальности, и не самкой, обладающей силой рода, а конкретным образом вечной женственности, призванной соединить мужественную силу с Божеством.") (40)

Femininity's true function was to pave the way for man's union with God, thus participating in the creation of a better new world: women are poorly equipped for professional lives and should instead "incarnate the Eternal Femininity, i.e. one of the sides of the divine nature and in this way guide the world to loving harmony, to beauty and freedom." ("воплотить в мир вечную женственность, т.е. одну из сторон божественной природы и этим путем вести мир к любовной гармонии, к красоте и свободе.") (39)

The mystical re-appraisal of the function of woman and femininity that Berdyaev called for was provoked by a disbelief in the power of formal equality. Woman was accorded a vague but elevated status in the transcendent process of



obtaining a perfect and immortal soul. Egalitarian emancipation aimed, in Berdyaev's views, at the minimization of sexual difference, hence the resistance to the discourse of equal rights in Berdyaev's works. Women, and their undifferentiated sexuality were a dark force with a potential for utilizing their elemental powers to the end of establishing future harmony. Equality should not be written into law where it degenerated into a farce of imitation, but should be incorporated into the tacit agreement of the couple.

Just like other worshippers of the Eternal Femininity in turn-of-the-century Russia, Berdyaev did not see marital union as an appropriate channel for the individual's sexuality. In fact, he even told his wife that if his high hopes of witnessing the Eternal Femininity in her were not reciprocated with a similar sentiment on her part, he would turn to a prostitute<sup>40</sup>, the proper outlet for the cursed sex. If not consecrated by mutuality and enlightened by modern philosophy, sexuality should not contaminate the relationship of the couple, but remain where it belonged: the ditch.

In his discussion of the Russian turn-of-the-century project of eliminating the sex act and childbirth, E. Naiman stated that this was disguised by the glorification of sex, at first sight apparent in the literature and philosophy of the time. Sex was only legitimised as it was redefined and, as in Berdyaev's philosophy, related to creativity. According to Naiman, it is the perception of sex as omnipresent that urges Berdyaev to search desperately for an escape from it, which he finds in a possible re-channeling of sexuality into a creative sex, androgyny.<sup>41</sup>

It appears that the clearest way of understanding Berdyaev's dubiety in his discussion of sex is through a split into good and bad sexuality, (correspondingly,

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<sup>40</sup> N. Berdyaev, "Pis'mo L. Yu. Rapp", p.16.

<sup>41</sup> E.Naiman, *Sex in Public*, p.35-36.

creative and reproductive); there is no redefinition of sexuality per se. The complexity of the human condition lay in exactly this combination of opposing forces, forever at a struggle with each other. The moment had come for the human to rise and defeat the beast:

"It becomes possible to pose the question whether child-bearing sex, and the sex act, is natural in the highest sense of the word? Isn't the very sex act an anomaly? Only in our transitional epoch one can seriously doubt that."

("Становится возможной постановка вопроса о том, естествен ли в высшем смысле этого слова, нормален ли рождающий пол с его сексуальным актом? Не есть ли аномалия сам сексуальный акт? Лишь в нашу переходную эпоху можно серьезно в этом усомниться.")<sup>42</sup>

The question whether the sex act is normal became valid when put under the test of higher, superhuman standards. The Nietzschean task of overcoming the human could now be solved in mystical terms. Largely, it was the eschatological feelings of the 'new religious consciousness' that stipulated this turn to mysticism. As O. Matich points out in her discussion of the popularity of Gnosticism in the turn-of-the-century Russia, at moments of deeply felt crises, non-rational frameworks begin to dominate over reliance on reason. In the 1890s in Russia the intelligentsia started re-evaluating utilitarianism, reliance on science and its own 'civic idealism'.<sup>43</sup> Turning to sexuality as a non-rational and ambivalent force offered the possibility of attaining perfect harmony on the personal, if not the social level. Exorcising demons in the name of a higher individual promised the reward of a transcendent state where the power of *pod* had no access.

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<sup>42</sup> N. Berdyaev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 235.

The appeal of mysticism at the beginning of the century may be easier to account for than dissidents' interest in it. It appears that the Soviet regime's statements on the achievement of equality for all generated a profound aversion for liberal egalitarianism relying on the equality in the face of legislation. It has been noted that Soviet dissident thought was a link to the philosophy of the turn of the century,<sup>44</sup> which made mystical thought an important input in the critique of the Soviet state. Dissidents' interest in the religious search of their predecessors was also rooted in their belief that "socialism was not an economic or political doctrine but primarily an atheistic philosophy of life."<sup>45</sup> Thus, the religious mysticism of the end of the 1970s was instrumental in a critique of the Soviet state, also providing space for the criticism of the egalitarian feminism of the West and, in that way nourishing the more Slavophile attitudes among dissidents. The philosophy of N. Berdyaev represented a religious existentialist's search for a perfect creative condition, beyond the social structures and, thus, appeared to satisfy all the spiritual demands of dissident thought.

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<sup>43</sup> O.Matich, "Western Philosophical Systems in Russian Literature" in Anthony M. Mlikotin (ed.), *Western Philosophical Systems in the Russian Literature* (University of South California Press: Los Angeles, California, 1979), p.165.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony M. Mlikotin, "Existentialism and Soviet Dissent", p.209.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 201.

### **Chapter III. FEMALE RESPONSES TO THE ETERNAL FEMININE.**

#### **Zinaida Gippius: Love, Marriage and the "New Religious Consciousness".<sup>46</sup>**

Temira Pachmuss in her *Zinaida Hippius, An Intellectual Profile* (1971) characterizes the turn of the century religious and philosophical thought as "visions of the Eternal and the absolute" that "appear distorted and even ludicrous to the modern reader."<sup>46</sup> The author also claims "the religious thought that was typical of the Russian intelligentsia at the turn of the century has no validity today."<sup>47</sup> This is perfectly true if one were to look at the official Soviet ideology of the 1970s and its unambiguous stance on any brand of thought that was celebrating a religious and mystical worldview. However, as will be shown in the following chapters, there was a significant response to the turn-of-the-century tradition of religious mystical thinkers among the dissidents involved in what came to be known "second culture" in Leningrad in the 1970s and early 1980s.

In this chapter I will discuss the "new religious consciousness" so as to highlight those aspects that will be important for the discussion of its appropriation by the Soviet dissidents.

If the turn of the century attracted dissident groups interested in philosophy and religion, it was mostly the theories of thinkers like Solov'ev, Berdyaev, Florensky that were in the focus of their attention. All of them in different ways were instrumental in the development of a unique tradition of religious thought that arose among the Russian intelligentsia in the early twentieth century, known as the "new

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<sup>46</sup> T. Pachmuss, *Zinaida Hippius. An Intellectual Profile*. (Southern University Press, 1971), p.4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

religious consciousness".<sup>48</sup> Their roles in this phenomenon were entirely different, Vladimir Solov'ev being its seminal thinker, Nikolai Berdyaev an active contributor to it, and Pavel Florensky a vehement critic of it, but it is the recognition of the need to update the hopelessly autocratic institution of Church that made their thought appreciated by the late Soviet dissidents. Later chapters will provide a more or less comprehensive analysis of the ideas appropriated by the religious feminists of the Maria and Woman and Russia groups. At this point I will attempt to look at a figure whose ideas were of central importance to the development of the "new religious consciousness", Zinaida Gippius. To be sure, Gippius's influence was not as direct as that of the previous authors. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to pinpoint any explicit impact of Zinaida Gippius' writing on the underground Soviet feminists. However, Gippius' development of the ideas of the Eternal Feminine, Sophia and the mystical marriage deserve analysis as both unique and in many ways characteristic of turn-of-the-century thought.<sup>49</sup> It was D.S. Merezhkovsky and Z. Gippius who were at the foundation of the Religious Philosophical Society (1901-1903) that articulated the problems that constituted the bulk of the "new religious consciousness" project. The most significant facet of her writing, however, from the point of view of this analysis, is Gippius's remarkable attempt at uniting religious and feminist discourses, an attempt that would also take place in the work of the Maria group leader, Tatyana Goricheva.

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<sup>48</sup> Although the 'new religious consciousness' originated at the philosophical assemblies, it came to mean, according to B. G. Rosenthal, the cluster of the ideas of the following thinkers - Merezhkovsky, Gippius, Dm. Filosofov, A. Belyi, V. Ivanov, A. Blok, V. Rozanov, N. Minskii, S. Bulgakov and N. Berdyaev. In B. G. Rosenthal, "The 'New Religious Consciousness' in *Russian Culture in Modern Times*, eds. R. Hughes, I. Paperno, (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1994) p. 134.

<sup>49</sup> There are hardly any explicit citations, but I do not exclude a possibility of ambiguous evidence of impact.

I would argue that Gippius exemplifies a feminist "against the word", with religious, mystical and creative concerns prevailing over social ones. It is this attempt to define the metaphysical status of woman in relation to her sexuality that would also characterise the feminist position of the early 1980s religious feminist group, although the attitude to motherhood as central to female sexuality was dramatically different from that expressed by Gippius.

The problem of authorship within the Merezhkovsky-Gippius union is well known. Vladimir Zlobin, the secretary and long time companion of the Merezhkovskys, asserts that all-important ideas originated with her, Merezhkovsky's role being compared to that of a fertile soil.<sup>50</sup> In this essay I will refer to ideas that might originally have been articulated by Merezhkovsky, but which are reformulated or can be traced in Gippius' poems, stories, diaries, or critical articles.

In fact, the purity of the origins of their ideas did not appear to disturb either of the thinkers. Thus, their theory of love as a force containing a potential for overcoming death and achieving eternal life through the restoration of spiritual androgyny was developed shortly after the publication of Vladimir Solov'ev's "The Meaning of Love". According to Gippius, Merezhkovsky never read Solov'ev carefully<sup>51</sup>, and the proximity of their philosophies is a mere coincidence. However, this has been cogently questioned<sup>52</sup>, and it appears that the exchange of ideas was an accepted principle of their writing, [or, as Gippius puts it there are incidents of metaphysical meetings (встречи) ]. In her essay "Я? Не я?" (1903) in a rebuff to what might have been an accusation of taking over others' ideas, Gippius says that "...a thought expressed is to be appreciated in itself, it remains true (if it is true), even were

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<sup>50</sup> V. Zlobin, *Tyazhelaya dusha* ( Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p.8.

<sup>51</sup> O. Matich, *Paradox in the Religious Poetry of Zinaida Gippius* (Munich: W. Fink, 1977), p.70.

"I" not "the first" to express it." ("...высказанная мысль судится сама по себе, и остается верной (если верна), даже если и не "я", "первый" ее высказал.")<sup>53</sup>

While the Silver Age is recognized to have polemicized with 19th century utilitarianism and positivism<sup>54</sup>, including the role and place of sexuality, it has been argued that the basic units of the 'new religious consciousness' transformation program were inherited from the ideologies it declared to be denouncing. Thus, according to O. Matich, in the Merezhkovskys' vision of the Third Testament, Eros, religion and sociality played the same roles as asceticism, atheism and concern with the social issues in nihilist and anti-nihilist ideology.<sup>55</sup> Matich points to the various aspects of the 'new religious consciousness', uniting it with the Chernyshevskian ideas of relations between sexes. Even the personal life of Gippius and Merezhkovsky (and Filosofov) can be seen as the direct implementation of Chernyshevsky's model of relations between sexes in "What Is To Be Done?". Since it is theories of sexuality and its relation to marriage at the turn of the century that are crucial for this essay, a brief outline of the corresponding discussion within populism may be useful here. Marriage in the ideology of populism was often referred to as a metaphor for a socially useless lifestyle. It represented a traditional institution that was hampering one's personality, diverting interest of men from the social realm and ultimately enslaving women by rooting them in the domestic sphere. On the other hand, marriage offered young women an escape from the patriarchal domination. Therefore, the ideal solution pursued by many radical young men and women in the 1860s –1870s was a

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> "Ya ne ya?" in Anton Krainii, *Literaturnyi dnevniki* (1899-1907)(Moskva: AGRAF, 2000), p. 113.

<sup>54</sup> T. Pachmuss, Nicolas Zernov *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963).

<sup>55</sup> Olga Matich, "The Merezhkovskys' Third Testament and the Russian Utopia Tradition" in R. P. Hughes, I. Paperno, p. 158.

fictitious marriage that later became "an important symbol of human relations."<sup>56</sup> Thus, marriage and Eros in the populist understanding were seen as agents of the rebirth of the new man. Solov'ev and those who followed him took up this metaphoric power of re-channelling sexuality for the sake of ultimate transformation. In the eschatological frame of mind of the turn of the century in Russia, the transformation of sexuality lost its metaphorical value to become a serious philosophical project.

Solov'ev wrote that the social and civic order were felt by him to be entirely out of joint, and that "a conscious belief that the current state of humanity is not the way it should be means that it should be changed, transformed." ("...сознательное убеждение в том, что настоящее состояние человечества не таково, каким быть должно, значит для меня, что оно должно быть изменено, преобразовано.")<sup>57</sup>

The transformation of humankind together with the expectations of a major upheaval was interpreted now in mystical, not populist terms, with numerous references to religious ideas and practices. Since much of the turn-of-the-century thought was coloured by apocalyptic feelings, it was natural for the new religious consciousness to think of salvation that was to be found in the only type of ideal society identified as *соборность* (*sobornost'*).

The ethos of salvation prominent in the new religious consciousness was also present in the radical thought of the 1870s. The populist intelligentsia who invested their missionary aspirations in the Russian peasantry pursued the ideal of salvation.

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<sup>56</sup> O. Matich, "Symbolist Meanings of Love", p.41.



Harold Williams wrote:

"The intelligentsia bore the character of a religious body rather than a literary class. Its attitude resembled that of the Puritans and their successors. It had a Non-Conformist conscience, but the ideal pursued was not of the salvation of the individual soul but the salvation of the Russian people."<sup>57</sup>

While the radical intelligentsia was committed to strife with autocracy, thus, opposing itself to Orthodoxy ("A deep contradiction existed between this dogmatically held atheism and the code of moral behaviour accepted by the intelligentsia"),<sup>59</sup> it nonetheless pursued its political convictions in religious ways.

This contradiction was heightened by the emphasis on sacrifice and self-abnegation, bearing a close affinity to the ideals of committed Christians. Only the spiritual duties were transposed to the social realm, where total dedication was expected. The populists' confidence in the peasant community as a site of political transformation was undermined by the end of the 19th century, to be taken up by many turn-of-the-century artists. They took an intense interest in certain aspects of peasant culture as the site of the truly Russian spiritual tradition, taking a close look at folklore in a search for indigenous cultural model. While the ideology of 'going to the people' in the 1870s heavily relied on the imagery of redemption, whereas the intelligentsia assumed the role of the missionary, by the beginning of the new century it was the idea of sobornost', the alternative to the Western type democracy, that put peasantry in the focus of the creative intelligentsia. Thus, the missionary zeal was now transformed into a scrutiny for the aesthetic and religious elements only to be found in the sites uncontaminated by the "historical Christianity".<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> V.A. Sarychev, *Estetika russkogo modernizma. Problema 'zhiznetvorchestva'*. (Izdatel'stvo Voronezhskogo universiteta, 1991), p.7.

<sup>58</sup> H. Williams, *Russia of the Russians* (L., 1914, p.129), quoted in Nicholas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963), p.4.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>60</sup> For a while it was khlysts that attracted the interests of thinkers and artists as different as Berdyaev, Merezhkovskii, Gippius and Blok. For the discussion of this attempted dialogue see A.Etkind, *Sodom i*

The artists and thinkers active in Sergey Diaghilev's *World of Art* group and later the Religious Philosophical Society, saw themselves, however, as representing a point of rupture from the populist ethos of the 1860s. Zinaida Gippius wrote about the gatherings at Diaghilev's:

"Wednesdays collected few people. Invitations were issued only to the cream of artistic and literary circles. Those who were even slightly tainted by the spirit of the 60s were excluded; for the spirit of political radicalism had reigned too long over the mentality of the Russian people."<sup>61</sup>

Symbolism and artists' turn toward mysticism and religion was not only the immediate reaction to the ideology-driven literary criticism of the 1860s, but also to the industrialization and urbanization of the 90s. Slavophile notes were reverberating both in social thought (*sobornost'*) and literary criticism.<sup>62</sup> Merezhkovsky's "On the Decline of Russian Literature" (1892) asserted that literature should be concerned with the national idea, rather than political or economic problems. A few years later, in his essay "Tolstoy and Dostoevsky" Merezhkovsky condemned art driven by intellect, which, in his view, was represented by Tolstoi, in whom 'the thinker condemned the artist'. Dostoevsky exemplified the opposite, a truly religious art, where intellect was guided by love for the fellow men.<sup>63</sup>

Nicholas Zernov marks Merezhkovsky's "Tolstoi and Dostoevskii" (1900) as "a turning point in the evolution of Russian culture" that "closed the period of

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*Psikheya. Ocherki intellektual'noi istorii Serebryanogo veka.* (M: ITS-Garant, 1996); A. Etkind, *Khlyst: sekty, literatura i revolyutsiya* (M: NLO, 1998); R. Vroon, "The Old Belief and Sectarianism as Cultural Models in the Silver Age" in R.P. Hughes, I. Paperno.

<sup>61</sup> N. Zernov, p. 86.

<sup>62</sup> B. G. Rosenthal *Dmitrii Seregeevich Merezhkovsky and the Silver Age: The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality.* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1975).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 70-72.

persistent anti-Christian bias"<sup>64</sup>, thus, suggesting a strict division line between the 19th century atheist radicalism and the religious revival of the beginning of the century. B.G. Rosenthal suggests that Russian Symbolism's mysticism was invoked as a means "to battle the traditional intelligentsia and the new forces of industrialism."<sup>65</sup>

Although it is tempting to see the new religious consciousness as the 20th century intelligentsia's repudiation of the materialist positivist ideology and a radical rupture in the intellectual tradition, a number of recent studies suggest that "the new religious consciousness", albeit critical of the ascetic tendencies within both Russian Orthodoxy and nihilist intelligentsia, may have proved to be a more conservative development of the same ascetic fervor.<sup>66</sup>

On November 29th, 1901 the first religio-philosophical assembly was held to be followed by twenty more sessions throughout the next year and a half. The meeting point of the Russian intelligentsia and the representatives of the Russian Orthodox clergy, the Religious Philosophical Society was the formative point of what came to be known the 'new religious consciousness'. Inspired by Solovyov's ideas on Sophia, enthusiastic about the synthesis of Christianity and paganism, but no less disillusioned about the 'historical Christianity' (the institution of the Church), those grouped around Merezhkovsky and Gippius were stimulated by the eschatological expectations of the turn of the century. The feeling that the end of history was nigh stipulated "a shift of the center of gravity in historical dialectics from the past to the future".<sup>67</sup> The religious sociality project rested in part on the rejection of the 'scientificity' of the positivist-minded creative intelligentsia that, according to Berdyaev, was connected to the

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<sup>64</sup> N.Zernov, p.87.

<sup>65</sup> B. G. Rosenthal, *D.S. Merezhkovsky*, p.37.

<sup>66</sup> O. Matich, "The Merezhkovskys' Third Testament", p. 158. Also see O. Matich, "The Symbolist Meanings of Art: Theory and Practice" in I. Paperno and J.D. Grossman.

<sup>67</sup> Rev. V.V. Zen'kovskii, *Istoriya russkoi mysli*, vol. 2, (YMCA-PRESS: Paris, 1989), p. 295.

"oblivion of the mystery of life."<sup>68</sup> While Merezhkovsky stressed that religion was a basic human need, he explicitly opposed "the historical Christianity", while neither he or Zinaida Gippius came to identify with the Orthodoxy. The revival of interest in religion and mysticism could rather be accounted for by the desire to create the "philosophy of culture" that later became the enterprise of the Russian Symbolism. The new religious consciousness originated exactly to accommodate the view of art as "innately religious activity, a way of communicating with the Divine."<sup>69</sup> Indeed, Symbolism could be regarded an "aesthetic expression of the new religious consciousness",<sup>70</sup> or "a religion of art, whose central values were beauty, aesthetic creativity, and emotional liberation."<sup>71</sup> A mystical epistemology was thus invoked to accommodate a theory in which art would be both theorized as a reflection of other worlds and be explained with the help of this epistemology. However, the most concise expression for new religious consciousness would be "the utopian project of resurrection".<sup>72</sup> Resurrection was to be achieved at the expense of sexual activity and therefore procreation. While criticized for its asceticism, contrasted with the Old Testament by Rozanov and with antiquity by Merezhkovsky, Christianity was spurned for its emphasis on the spiritual at the expense of the corporeal, for resurrecting the soul while forsaking the body.<sup>73</sup> The militant atheism of the previous generations did

<sup>68</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, *Sub specie aeternitatis* quoted in Rev. V.V. Zenkovskii, p. 295.

<sup>69</sup> Bartlett and Edmondson, "Collapse and Creation: Issues of Identity and the Russian Fin-de-Siecle" in C.Kelly, D.Shepherd (eds.), *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.174.

<sup>70</sup> B. G. Rosenthal, "The "New Religious Consciousness" in R.Hughes, I.Paperno, 134.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p.135.

<sup>72</sup> See O Matich, "The Merezhkovskys' Third Testament"; E. Naiman, *Sex in Public*, Chapter 1.

<sup>73</sup> Rozanov's fascination with the Old Testament and Judaism was outweighed by the more popular idea of the synthesis of Christianity and paganism (Vyacheslav Ivanov and the Dionysian cult). It was also severely criticized by Gippius a number of times. An example of this is an implicit attack in Gippius' article "Vechnyi zhid":

"Израиль не понял, что его старый путь, путь приуготовления, пройден до конца, - и в этом доньше его мировая трагедия...всякая попытка вернуться к упраздненной, исполненной, святости - приводит к извращению религиозного чувства, демонизму и кощунству...Теперь настало самое опасное время для усиления этого религиозного недуга" in Anton Krainii,

not give way to an acceptance of Russian Orthodoxy, while the scrutiny of Christian practices resulted in a condemnation of the 'historical Christianity' for its 'ascetic non-truth' ('asketicheskaya nepravda').<sup>74</sup> This view was countered by Pavel Florenskii's criticism of the 'new religious consciousness', accusing the thinkers subscribing to it of ignorance. In Florensky's view, the idea that material world is evil originated in Gnostic heresy, not in Christianity.<sup>75</sup> Florensky distinguished sharply between beauty and goodness. While he saw carnality as unbeautiful although it was feasible for the carnal to be good, ascetics in his opinion possessed spiritual beauty even if they were sinners.<sup>76</sup> The transformation of sexuality that the Symbolists tried implementing through the practice alternative to marriage was inspired by the vision of the androgyne, the ideal bisexual being capable of achieving immortality. Androgyny started making its way into the discussions of religion with introduction of the Divine Wisdom as the Eternal Feminine, leading to the vision of Christ as *мужедева* (man-maiden).

This reflected the aspirations of the "new religious consciousness" "to unite the masculine and the feminine, the natural and the cultural, the earthly and the heavenly in the fusion of mystico-erotic images" ("соединить мужское и женское, природное и культурное, земное и небесное в единых мистико-эротических образах").<sup>77</sup> In A.Etkind's argument, the "new religious consciousness" came close to the doctrines of the Russian sectarians (*хлысты*). In particular the idea of Christ as an androgyne

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*Literaturnyi dnevnik*, p.149. ("Israel did not realize that its old way, the way of preparation has been trodden up to the end – and that is its tragedy up to this day...any attempt to return to the cancelled, fulfilled sanctity – leads to the distortion of religious feeling, demonism and sacrilege...Now has come the most dangerous time for the growth of this religious disease.")

<sup>74</sup> V.V. Zen'kovsky, *Istoriya Russkoi filosofii*, (YMCA-Press: Paris, 1989), v.2, p.297.

<sup>75</sup> B. G.Rosenthal, "The "New Religious Consciousness" in R. Hughes, I. Paperno, eds., 144.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p.141

<sup>77</sup> Alexandr Etkind, *Sodom i Psikheya. Ocherki intellektual'noi istorii Serebryanogo veka*.(M: ITS-Garant, 1996), p. 73.

suggests a re-conceptualization of the Holy Trinity that is close to the khlysts' interpretation: "...if the masculine principle incarnate in Christ is indistinguishable from the feminine principle, then Christ is identified with the Mother of God." ("если мужское начало в лице Христа неотлично от женского, то Христос отождествляется с Богородицею...")<sup>78</sup>

*Хлысты* (a sect of self-flagellants), with their radical take on the mortification of flesh, interestingly, had much to offer to those who claimed to be redeeming the flesh. Paradoxically, thinkers that resented the ascetic character of Christianity took an intense interest in the sect that combined radical abstinence and seasonal promiscuity.

Some Symbolists incorporated elements of sectarianism in their worldview, and the explicit and implicit references to khlysts and their practices abounded in the culture of the Silver Age with its intense interest in archaic Russian tradition.<sup>79</sup>

According to R. Vroon, sectarianism was appropriated by the high culture in a number of ways. As an instance of the indigenous uncontaminated cultural model, it was utilized by Bal'mont, Gorodetskij, Remizov, "who appropriated the style of the 'dissident' texts to produce works with an explicitly Russian bias".<sup>80</sup> Apart from the reinforcement of the national ethos, sectarianism contained a potential for religious dialogue, but one that eventually was not realized. After an attempted communication, Gippius and Merezhkovsky were left disenchanted by the sectarians' rigidity and saw no possibility of cultural negotiation.<sup>81</sup> R. Vroon calls the position of these authors "itself sectarian, or the very least agnostic." This when confronted with the religious dissidence resulted, in his view, for Merezhkovsky, in a neo-protestant universalism,

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.74.

<sup>79</sup> Etkind, *Sodom i Psikheya*, p. 89, p. 92.

<sup>80</sup> R.Vroon, p. 180.

for Gippius – in a militant agnosticism.<sup>82</sup>

While in many ways Zinaida Gippius's thought was typical of the new religious consciousness, some of the ideas she developed in relation to sexuality make her a unique figure. Sexuality was at the crux of much of the Silver Age thought: a conviction of the necessity to redeem the flesh was perceptible in both art and philosophy. However, Russian Symbolism also produced a tradition of celibate marriages<sup>83</sup>, while Russian philosophy of the turn of the century celebrated immortality at the expense of procreation<sup>84</sup>. Reflecting upon the future forms of marriage, Zinaida Gippius and Dmitrii Merezhkovky believed that the sex act would no longer exist.<sup>85</sup>

Although in "Влюбленность"(1904) Gippius admits that marriage may be the most profound manifestation of sexuality, she stresses that it is not the only valid one and that it can only be accepted consciously after sexuality is understood as a crucial existential problem. It is not accidental that marriage is here implicitly defined as the form of sexuality inseparably connected with procreation. As has been noted, the entire discussion of sexuality within Symbolism pivoted on the problem of procreation.

Rooting their negative attitude to procreation in Solov'ev's resentment of birth as the symbol of mortality, Symbolists reserved love for the purposes of achieving immortality, while sexuality was to be steered towards "mental progeny, artistic and

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<sup>81</sup> Merezhkovsky later pointed out to M. Prishvin that "the way of mysticism without philosophy was leading to the practice of *khlysts*" ("mysticheskii put' bez filosofii vedet k khlystovstvu") in Etkind, *Sodom i Psikheya*, p. 94.

<sup>82</sup> R. Vroon, p. 182.

<sup>83</sup> O.Matich, "Symbolist Meanings of Love". Also see the discussion of Lyubov' Mendeleeva-Blok's memoirs below.

<sup>84</sup> Naiman, p.47.

<sup>85</sup> T. Pachmuss, p.69.

spiritual".<sup>86</sup> A pronounced sexual persona was an integral part of the artist's image (be it virginity exhibited by Gippius through her plaited hair, or explicit homoeroticism in the case of Kuz'min, Diaghilev, Filosofov: what Matich calls "personal mythmaking", in her view, "had homoerotic connotations that went beyond simple sexual preferences."<sup>87</sup> Paradoxically, what the Silver Age culture amounted to could hardly be called liberation of sexuality, but rather its transformation through asceticism. This aspect of the turn-of-the-century thought remained rather obscure for the dissidents of the 1970s, while what became the focus of their attention was the special metaphysical status of the woman appropriated by them in their own terms. What liberating implications for women the Silver Age had or did not have, is less important for this essay than how it was perceived by the intellectuals of the later religious national revival.

Gippius' ideas on sexuality, related to Merezhkovsky's concept of consecrated flesh and androgyny, appear remote from the emphatic femininity of the Soviet religious feminists. However, I will show similarities in the philosophical outlook of Gippius and the leading author of the *Maria* group, Tatyana Goricheva, who also turned to religion in her quest for the meaning of sexuality. The very position of the two women trying to redeem the metaphysical status of femininity (even if Gippius did her best to downplay the traditional femininity in her own behaviour) account for the inevitable affinities in their texts; both shared dissatisfaction with the present forms of relations between sexes, which they felt was to be assuaged through a search for a redefinition of the meanings of gender. Their starting points were very dissimilar: Gippius' unorthodox attitude to Christianity was related to her radical re-

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<sup>86</sup> O. Matich, "Symbolist Meanings of Love", p.33.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p.33.



conceptualization of flesh, while Goricheva's ideal was Mother of God, who was seen by her as a figure capable of granting consecration.

In fact, Gippius' 'anti-feminist' stance is well known: her negative attitude toward feminism is probably best disclosed by her famous reference to the woman question as 'really quite revolting'.<sup>88</sup> As she apparently never came to identify with the feminine, Gippius explained her adoption of the masculine persona in both her lyric poetry and literary criticism by her desire "to write as a person, not only as a woman", implying the inferiority of the female authorial position. On the occasion of being asked to read her poetry at a women writers' evening, she replied, "No, thank you. I don't form any unions according to sexual denominators."<sup>89</sup> Goricheva's harsh remarks on the Western egalitarian feminism made in the 1970s have already been mentioned (...). They did not change their character after the years she had spent in the West, although her rejection of Western feminism had evolved into a much more solid argument.<sup>90</sup> As has been pointed out earlier, both the turn of the century and the 1960s-1970s saw a rapprochement of the Russian Orthodox Church and the heretofore atheist intelligentsia. It has been shown that the forum for the articulation of this process in the beginning of the century was the Religious Philosophical Society in St Petersburg. According to V.Zen'kovsky, "the new religious consciousness" was a conscious attempt to reconcile the intelligentsia and the Russian Orthodox Church, which he called a utopian project of "religious sociality" ("utopiya religioznoi obshchestvennosti").<sup>91</sup>

It will be shown that the 1970s produced a similar form of religious

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<sup>88</sup> R.Bartlett and L. Edmondson, p. 207.

<sup>89</sup> T. Pachmuss, p.17

<sup>90</sup> For the later discussion of the Western feminism see Goricheva's *Russkaya zhenshchina i pravoslavie* (SPb: 1996); Talking About God is Dangerous (SCM: London, 1986).

<sup>91</sup> V.Zen'kovsky, p.293.

communication, although its objectives had changed from the study of Church Fathers to the more topical themes, related to the contemporary condition, i.e., "Religion and Culture", "Religion and Ethics", "Christianity and the National Question".<sup>92</sup> Goricheva was one of the leading figures behind the Leningrad section of the seminar (whose activities will be discussed below) that had also had an implicit objective of reconciling the intelligentsia and the Church. Most of the participants in both assemblies were members of the creative intelligentsia, and, therefore, the question of the relationship of Christianity and culture was one of the central issues for both religious revivals.

The roots for the discontent with the contemporary state of marriage may have been different for Gippius and Goricheva. However, both of them articulated their dissatisfaction with the ideas of marriage and gender. In her article, "Влюбленность", Gippius suggested that marriage should be re-defined beyond its traditional function of the legitimate outlet for sex. The union of the two had always been an additional concern on the road to other attainments, whereas now it should become the channel for the accomplishment of the task of love.<sup>93</sup> Elsewhere she implicitly compares the present state of relations between sexes with a stagnating household which is legitimized by the age-old tradition, and which she herself refuses to live in:

"They [people] call God for Him to come to them, where they are, and to tell them: 'No, it isn't a sin, and even if it was – I will forgive you, for you have remembered me and called me. Don't worry.' And I have nowhere to call God in, I am on my journey. There is no suitable home that I would want to live in eternally; I want to go to God myself; there ahead of me, closer to Him, I believe, there are better homes and I want them."

("Они [люди] зовут Бога, чтобы он пришел к ним, где они, и сказал: 'Нет, не грех; а коли и грех - прошу за то, что вспомнили Меня и позвали. Не беспокойтесь'. А мне некуда звать Бога, я в путешествии. Нет подходящего дома, в котором хотела бы вечно жить; я сама хочу идти к Богу; там впереди, ближе к Нему, есть, верую, лучшие дома - их хочу.")<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> J.B.Dunlop, p. 55.

<sup>93</sup> Z. Gippius, "Vlyublennost'" in Shestakov V., ed., *Russkii Eros* (Moskva: Progress, 1989), p. 193

<sup>94</sup> Z. Gippius, "Contes d'Amour" in Z. Gippius, *Dnevnik* (M: NPK "Intellvak", 1999), vol.1, p. 71.

Thus, in Gippius' view, people needed religion as the justification for the existing forms of marriage, whereas she believed in the potential for the religion to accommodate her theory of triadic union. In this framework, Eros was accorded the role of the pontifex, the Divine uniting force that merged the individual with the object of their love as well as with God.<sup>95</sup>

Goricheva, in her turn, blamed the distortion of gender concepts and gender roles for the deteriorating spiritual status of the modern marriage. However, she also believed that "the encounter of the two is always triadic. They can only know each other by taking part in God, in the cosmic liturgy." ("Встреча двоих всегда троична. Узнать друг друга они могут лишь в Боге, в космической литургии.")<sup>96</sup> Without subscribing to the ideas of the "new religious consciousness" resurrection project and the ideas of androgyny (although heavily influenced by N. Berdyaev and Vl. Solov'ev, as will be shown below), she relates the love union to the attainment of immortality:

"Love of the two is impossible without communion in God, and through him in immortality (and in all the three time modes) and infinity"

("Любовь двоих невозможна без Причастия Богу, а через него вечности (всем трем модусам времени) и бесконечности.")<sup>97</sup>

Born out of different spiritual concerns the discussions of marriage by Gippius and Goricheva share a number of points and support the argument of the similarity of intellectual frameworks that each of them operated in. Discontent with the state of gender roles and interaction between sexes, re-appraisal of marriage and sexuality in both cases caused the authors to turn to the realm of the spiritual and, more

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<sup>95</sup> Z. Gippius, "Arifmetika lyubvi" in Shestakov V., ed., *Russkii Eros* (Moskva: Progress, 1989), p. 196.

<sup>96</sup> T. Goricheva, "Anna, Emma i drugie" in T. Goricheva, ed. *Russkaya zhenshchina i pravoslavie*, p. 134.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.134.

specifically, of the religious for solutions. The affinity of these ideas on its own certainly does not prove the basic argument of this work on the influence of the turn-of-the century philosophy on the mindset of the dissenting intelligentsia of the 1970s. The purpose of this parallel was to highlight the major concerns related to sexuality in the works of major female authors of the two respective periods.

### **Lyubov' Blok: Beautiful Lady as "Casualty".**

As has been shown, the cult of the Beautiful Lady, whom the Russian Symbolists took for an incarnation of the Eternal Feminine, was a reworking of the medieval cult of the unattainable woman.<sup>98</sup> Although the medieval cult of the Beautiful Lady was a compensation for the humiliation and lack of rights, according to one author, the relationship between the Beautiful Lady and the knight empowered the woman, even if temporarily.<sup>99</sup> This chapter will show what the medieval courtly relationship could involve for a woman in the context of Russian turn-of-the-century culture.

When Vladimir Solovyov wrote about the idea of Sophia, or, the Eternal Feminine, there could be no mistaking that "feminine" in the context stood for a principle identified as being in opposition to the rational cognitive mode, i.e. a principle that was accessible through intuition and divination, derived from the subconscious and elemental. Even if quite abstract and evasive, not rigorously defined, the idea as developed by Solovyov, with its potential for communication with a higher world through intuitive creativity, appealed to Russian symbolists of both

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<sup>98</sup> O. Matich, "Symbolist Meanings of Love"; V.D. Leleko, "Zhenshchina: esteticheskoe oformlenie odnoi iz sotsial'nykh rolei" in G.A. Tishkin, ed., *Feminizm i rossiiskaya kul'tura* (SPb, 1995).

generations. It reaches the point of greatest intensity in Aleksandr Blok's poems. His Beautiful Lady, while bearing the traces of Solovyov's influence, also has elements of a material woman, an encounter with which is always painful.

Thus, a principle that had been quite elusive before Blok had now become material, opening up various possibilities for interpretations. Solovyov's various incarnations of Sophia were devoid of sexual connotations, and could only be traced to the rather distant temporal and spatial locales (e.g. Ancient Egypt) rather than seen in smoky restaurants on a daily basis.<sup>100</sup> Despite some oversimplification in this comparison, nonetheless it is possible to say that Blok saw his beloved, Lyubov' Mendeleeva, later his wife, as the immediate corporeal incarnation of the Beautiful Lady; she inspired a persistent belief that Eternal Feminine could be reified occasionally. This belief was not confined to Blok, but was also widely shared among his contemporaries (e.g. Andrei Bely, who actually envisaged Lyubov' Mendeleeva as the Woman Clothed in the Sun, the Eternal Feminine and Sophia at once<sup>101</sup>) and resurfaced in the late Soviet and post-Soviet period.<sup>102</sup>

Lyubov' Dmitrievna, who outlived her husband by 18 years, speaks of the experience of living the idea, of being it and eventually overcoming its boundaries in her memoirs *What Happened and What Didn't*<sup>103</sup>, written 16 years after her husband's death but left unpublished until the late 1970s. The text provides a unique opportunity for the analysis of discrepancies between the meanings ascribed to the 'function' of the

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<sup>99</sup> Leleko, p. 46.

<sup>100</sup> With the exception of the poem *Tri Svidaniya* by Solovyov where one of the encounters takes place in the British Museum.

<sup>101</sup> A. Belyi, *Vospominaniya o Bloke*, Ch.2.

<sup>102</sup> N. Mandelshtam, *Vtoraya kniga* (YMCA-Press: Paris, 1972), p.159.

<sup>103</sup> *Byli i nebylitsy*, the title as translated by B. Heldt in *Terrible Perfection. Women and Russian Literature*. (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987), p.94.

Poet's wife, the Beautiful Lady herself, and her own ideas of what it was to be beautiful and to be a wife.

Lyubov' Mendeleeva's memoirs are a remarkable instance of female self-consciousness asserting itself both through explicit style and through the themes tackled. Barbara Heldt in her *Terrible Perfection* gives the author tribute for her effort to regain control over defining her own self. In her view, this "amounted to a feat of heroism within its limited arena".<sup>104</sup> The effort to step out of the shadow of her famous husband, to emerge as a conscious writer and to defend her right to pleasure, made Mendeleeva's memoirs far more than a sketch of the epoch of the great master. Also remarkable, in view of the importance of beauty for both the ideal persona and the real personality of Lyubov' Mendeleeva, is her rational acceptance of old age and the painless farewell that she bids her sexual life.

Setting out to tell the world of Mendeleeva's real self, the memoirs achieve the task of disclosing the false apprehensions behind what B.Heldt called Blok's 'life-symbolizing attention'.<sup>105</sup> As unstructured as the text appears to be, it has several running motifs, the most prominent of which is the assertion of the 'real' self as opposed to the self that is imagined, socially expected, theorized by external witnesses. Although she herself is optimistic about the act of writing at some levels, she also invokes the invisible authority of those, who urge her to tell what she has seen. At the very beginning she makes it clear that her motivation for writing is not that of a casual witness, but of an attentive observer. Since she is no passive witness to the events of her life, to tell them she needs a perspective, a point of view, which she believes at the moment lacks objectivity and historicism since the task would

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<sup>104</sup> B. Heldt, p. 94.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p.93.

demand having settled all scores with one's life<sup>106</sup>. While at first she seems to be uncertain about her narrative authority, throughout the text a distinct position is created. She warns the reader in the foreword that the whole text is permeated with her love for herself, and that actually gives her account the perspective necessary to her, giving her a chance to focus on herself without further apologies. Not much is said of formative events and influences, still less of her parents, which may surprise the reader, in view of her father's prominence. The language of the narrative, impressionistic rather than epic, abounds in strikingly vivid sensations – smooth surfaces of furniture, the cambric of her dress, the enchanting play of rays on a sunny day, the overpowering scent of her perfume are consciously given prominence.

Thus, her reconstruction of life as a reconstruction aimed at reconciling beauty and sensuality makes it possible for her to restore her abandoned self. The centrality of beauty to her and her vision of beauty and sensuality in a harmonious entity is perhaps revealed most potently in her overt disgust with motherhood and its consequent destruction of beauty than in her complacent descriptions of her current perfection. The account of her professional and intellectual pursuits is less powerful but it is made prominent whenever she speaks of her real self, withered and stifled, and regrets the spiritual interests she has abandoned and the theatrical career she has not had enough persistence to develop. Thus, Mendeleeva's story is a way of revealing her actual self, the self of a human as she reiterates on a number of occasions, that had "to put up with much of the grim, cruel and 'unfair' of what life had in store...." <sup>107</sup> It was not so much the twists of fate that made the expression of her real self so difficult, as pressure to yield to Blok's idea of herself, easily taken up by those who

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<sup>106</sup> L.D. Mendeleeva, *Byli i nebylitsy* (Bremen: Verlag K Press, 1977).p. 5. Later in reference to this text only pages are given.

followed him. She remarks that her mode of perception was very different from that current in the literary milieu of her husband, and it is most likely that her disdainful 'they' (as in "they knew what I had to be like, because they knew what the value of 'the function' in the equation 'poet and his wife' was"<sup>108</sup>) is addressed to all those who took her to be the Beautiful Lady incarnate, whether or not she herself welcomed the idea.

Unknowingly stepping into the intricate world of Blok's life, with the process of oscillation between her real and poetic self already in progress, she was intrigued and flattered at the thought of being his Muse. As the courtship went on she became doubtful about their relationship, growing bored by his seeing her as 'an abstract idea'. She cites a letter, (January 1902) which demonstrates her dissatisfaction with Blok's love for his own construct, which she interprets as expressing the lack of interest in her emotions. It is here that she brings up for the first time the idea of human reality as opposed to the philosophical ideal, emphasizing what he had downplayed:

"You have imagined all sorts of nice things about me and because of this fantastic fiction only existing in your imagination, you have overlooked me, the live human being, with my live soul..."<sup>109</sup>

"Fiction" is the most eloquent expression of what she feels her life has been turned into that of a theorized marriage with her role reduced to what she calls the function in the equation<sup>110</sup>. She recognizes that it was her husband's elevating her to the status of an idea that limited her sexuality and pushed her into abstinence, an ideal which he glorified, as Aleksandr Etkind has argued, for the sake of staying

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<sup>107</sup> p.6.

<sup>108</sup> p.6.

<sup>109</sup> p.42.

<sup>110</sup> "They knew what I had to be, because they knew what was the value the "function" in the equation – poet and his wife. But I was not a "Function", I was a human being." (p..5).



symbolically faithful to his mother.<sup>111</sup> "The function in the equation" is what she recognizes as her imposed social persona implying a very definite set of expectations of the Poet's wife. Breaking expectations, in her public and her private life, through having a limited but independent career and through liberating her sexuality she managed to cease being the 'function' and reassert her 'human' side.<sup>112</sup>

It appears that the word "human" surfacing through the text comes to evoke earthly and corporeal connotations, since it is the body and sensuality that become the pivotal force of her liberation. The enjoyment that she derives from looking at herself naked, wishing to be seen and desired, the realization of the power of her beauty and the fear of its potential ruin by motherhood prepare the ground for Mendeleeva's deviant image of a femme fatale's uncontrollable sexuality that she defiantly places in the foreground.

The rebellion of the Beautiful Lady, as she herself ironically calls it,<sup>113</sup> is aimed against the falsity under that name which made others overlook her "simple human essence".<sup>114</sup> Her rebellion is introduced by a number of justifying reasons. "The blood of the ancestors used to robbing, murdering and raping"<sup>115</sup> is referred to as an overpowering force, and so are various circumstances shown to have had a decisive impact over her actions. Writing is obviously taken up as a means of reinstating control over her life, the lack of which she implicitly and explicitly suggests. Occasionally she still seems to be retreating into the shadow of other intellectual authorities when it comes to providing reasons and explanations. It is Freud and his disciples who are trusted to handle the fragile and intangible sphere of the human

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<sup>111</sup> A. Etkind, *Sodom i Psikheya*, p. 70.

<sup>112</sup> p. 6.

<sup>113</sup> p. 43.

<sup>114</sup> p. 53.

<sup>115</sup> p. 52.

psyche and eventually come up with truly scientific accounts of human sexuality. It is Western literature and her intense interest in it that are to blame for her taking up an explicit stance in relation to sexual matters.<sup>116</sup> It is the veneration of those who admired Blok's poetry and the theories of femininity incarnated in her that tempted her to exercise the power of her beauty over others.<sup>117</sup> Despite her assertion of the active role in life, she resorts to passive constructions with fate or circumstances as the real actors, as, for instance, when she first mentions her being psychologically prepared for unfaithfulness: "That spring I was left to the mercy of anyone who would persist in courting me."<sup>118</sup> However, the first affair, with Andrey Bely does not result in adultery, making her realize that she will never be 'unfaithful' to her husband, whatever others might think.<sup>119</sup> Having thus implicitly distinguished between adultery and unfaithfulness, she appears to be confirming the intellectual and emotional power of her husband, to whom she intends to remain faithful. Still this affair is a turning point in her marital life, because it is through it that she is spared the fate of being her husband's "submissive pupil".<sup>120</sup> Bely understands the "false nature" of the Bloks' marriage and captivates Lyubov's fantasy by his promises of the earthly love and devotion that according to him, every woman desires. It is not only that Bely can feel her dissatisfaction with her marital relationship that makes it a decisive point in her life, but that Blok's ideas on sexuality, ideas that she had come to accept, are seriously questioned. If Blok's equal, a poet of renown, desired her as a partner, sex could not be merely a manifestation of 'the lower' world, as Blok was convincing her.

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<sup>116</sup> p. 11.

<sup>117</sup> p. 53.

<sup>118</sup> p. 53.

<sup>119</sup> p. 57.

<sup>120</sup> p. 56.

Although she left Bely, and their relationship, according to her, remained unconsummated, she was now free to search for the love she had been looking for and that she could not find in either of the poets. The part of the memoirs following the affair with Belyi opens up a perspective for reading the whole text as the woman's search for her self through the discovery of her sexuality. The ecstasy that she finds, however, does not give her emotional satisfaction, for she comes to the conclusion that in every affair there was just one point of affinity, on which the relationship could be built. Heldt asserts that the memoirs provide "an explicit account of the conflict between female and male sexuality"<sup>121</sup>. The conflict appears to have been settled in narrow terms, as Mendeleeva comes to liberate her sexuality in her apparently numerous liaisons. However, Heldt's assertion about the central theme of the text still holds in the Lyubov'-Alexandr Blok relationship; the imposition of the male sexual criteria upon the female may be more broadly read as a conflict of the imagined, poeticized and perfected creation of the male and the real, corporeal and impure reality of the female.

If Lyubov' Mendeleeva's treatment of sexuality was unconventional, her attitude towards motherhood was even more so. While not untypical of the numerous fin-de-siecle projects of recasting sexuality, the Bloks' union was not aimed at creating progeny.<sup>122</sup> That was a relief for Lyubov' whose disgust for motherhood made her waver over marriage in general: "I said there was nothing in the world I hated as much as motherhood."<sup>123</sup> But it was not as easy to avoid motherhood in real sexual relations, as it had been with her husband. Pregnancy, which she saw as the slow destruction of her beauty, as a terrible ordeal that she consented to out of hopelessness, filled her

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<sup>121</sup> B.Heldt, p. 94.

with revolt and gave her no chance of finding reasons for her loss of wholeness:

"With disgust I was watching my body grow ugly, my small breasts coarsen, the skin of my belly stretch. With no part of my soul could I come to love the destruction of my beauty.<sup>124</sup>

Notably, the mental suffering she had to go through during pregnancy and the physical suffering during her four days of labour never stirred a note of expiation, since Lyubov' Blok did not consider herself to have been unfaithful. Telling of how she came to the brink of death, she recalls thinking that it would be so simple to die at that moment. What actually happened was even simpler: "But my son died, not I", and with that she finishes with the subject.

Her diseases, of which she writes with irony, marred her later years; for it is due to them that she makes a painless transition to old age. That is, she attributes her loss of beauty to the inevitable consequences of her constant ailments. This is also a sign of the absence of any pathology in her, she believes, in the sense that Freud would term certain patterns of female sexuality pathological. Occasional inadequacies in her behaviour, or, hysteria, are referred back to the same authority for explanation. Her enthusiasm about psychoanalysis and its power to decipher manifestations of the unconscious makes her keep Blok's family letters that she had intended to destroy, outraged and appalled by their insincerity and hostility to her, as well as by the signs of mental problems that, according to her, were shared by many of his relatives.

Lyubov' Blok's memoirs may be shattering the cramping ideal of the ethereal Beautiful Lady by voicing the absurdity of the situation that the insecurity of male desire had imposed on her. Importantly, she meets her own self when the turmoil of

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<sup>122</sup> For the discussion of the tradition of Russian thinkers exterminating children out of the picture of the ideal world see E. Naiman, *Sex in Public*, ch.1.

her own sexuality is gone, and when she can calmly assess her life, with its achievements and failures, regaining control, to the extent that the beauty of the live human subject (even though long gone) may triumph over the morbid beauty of the ideal.

The feminist critic of the 1990s may be less enthusiastic about this text than Barbara Heldt was. However, it is a document depicting the significant influence of Vladimir Solov'ev's ideas, as well as the far-reaching consequences of their appropriation. The "rebellion of the Beautiful Lady" transforms Lyubov' Mendeleeva from the object of the theory imposed on her into an active speaking subject.

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<sup>123</sup> p. 64.

<sup>124</sup> p. 66.

## **Chapter IV. RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS REVIVAL AND THE DISSIDENT MOVEMENT.**

This chapter will not discuss the history of the social protest in the Soviet Union known as 'dissent'. This history has been well documented and classifications of the dissident groups abound in the relevant literature.

This chapter will only provide a cursory excursion into the history and major divisions within the Soviet dissent. Instead it will primarily focus on the themes and ideas that the Russian dissident movement discussed within commentary on the process of religious, philosophical and national revival that dissidents saw themselves as involved in. I will concentrate particularly on the Religious-Philosophical Seminar, the most significant dissident religious group of the late Soviet period. I will also touch on the nationalist overtones of dissidents' discussions and on the relationship between religious and nationalist concerns. The analysis of dissidents' reflection on these issues and the importance attached to them, reveals a multi-dimensional picture of concerns within Soviet dissent, avoiding the view of dissent as composed of two isolated mutually opposed forces, i.e. the liberal democratic movement and the nationalist one.

The question of a religious revival in Russia and the problems related to the national consciousness were discussed and reflected upon by dissidents of various political convictions ever since the "thaw", stimulated by the Khrushchev anti-religious campaigns and a critical attitude to the years of Stalinism.

Russian nationalism became audible both in the official and unofficial circles in the first years of Brezhnev's rule, although, it has been shown, that the process

started in the Khrushchev era.<sup>125</sup> Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign was accompanied by the destruction of national monuments. The result was "to fuse believers and nationalists in a common struggle against a perceived national nihilism."<sup>126</sup>

From the beginning of the 1970s the nineteenth century Westernizers/Slavophiles debate was reactivated, with mutually exclusive opinions being voiced on the role and scale of the "Russian religious Renaissance". Whether the term was anyway a valid description of the intensity of the processes referred to will be briefly discussed below. Studies of Soviet dissent have argued that, from its inception (early 1960s) it had existed in the form of separate circles, allying or supporting one another temporarily, and reshaping frequently within these two powerful directions.<sup>127</sup> A lack of a homogeneous overall stance was combined with a dramatic range of opinions. On the one hand, there existed a conviction (of which Solzhenitsyn appeared to be an emblematic figure) that a vital religious revival was undoubtedly in progress. This view was summed up at a *Posev*<sup>128</sup> conference as follows:

"Russia is now undergoing a great religious revival... behind that revival stands the whole of the people that has long since shaken off even the very shade of Marxism and materialism;...repentance, that Solzhenitsyn was writing about, has taken over the very thick of the people"

("Россия сейчас переживает великое религиозное возрождение...[;]за этим возрождением стоит весь народ, внутренне давно отбросивший даже тень марксизма и материализма; ... покаяние, о котором писал Солженицын, охватило самую толщу народа.")<sup>129</sup>

But on the other hand, it was asserted that intelligentsia's interest in religion could by no means be called a revival, let alone a Renaissance, and that the process had merely created a superficial ferment. The reasons for that, it was held, primarily resided in the intellectual fashion for social transgression. The Church hierarchy was alleged to have irrevocably compromised itself; and, in the final count, the whole

<sup>125</sup> J.B.Dunlop, p. 37.

<sup>126</sup> G. Hosking, "Empire and Nation-Building in Late Imperial Russia" in G. Hosking, R. Service, eds., *Russian Nationalism. Past and Present* (Macmillan: London, 1989), p. 24.

<sup>127</sup> G.Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union. 1917-1991* (Fontana Press: London, 1992); G. Saunders, ed. *Samizdat. Voices of the Soviet Opposition* (New York: Monad Press, 1974); F. J. M. Feldbrugge, *Samizdat and Political Dissent in the Soviet Union* (Leyden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1975).

<sup>128</sup> *Posev* was a Munich-based publication that was dedicated to the coverage of the events within the internal opposition in the Soviet Union. It thus reflected the life of the dissent in the USSR and published many of the dissenters' texts in its appendix, *Vol'noe slovo*.

<sup>129</sup> E. Ternovskii, "Razmyshleniya o sovremennom polozhenii religii i Tserkvi v SSSR", *Posev*, 12, 1979, p.15. E. Ternovskii, an émigré writer, had contributed to the unofficial journal *Continent* when in Russia, and was an active contributor to *Russkaya mysl'* in Paris. Left the Soviet Union in 1975.

process of the turn to religion, it was argued, smacked of intellectual snobbery and pretension.<sup>130</sup>

The most problematic question in the assessment of religious activities in the 1970s was the scale of involvement with the Russian Orthodox Church and its teaching (as opposed to the scale of religious belief) and the depth of this involvement (i.e. whether the professed belief extended beyond the participation in rituals). Another problematic issue is that of the intelligentsia's claim to speaking on behalf of the people, whether in support or in denial of the existence of a true religious revival: the supposed aspirations of the *народ* (people) were often invoked as the only justification of the intelligentsia's search for God. The relationship of the intelligentsia and people in the writing by intellectuals appears to be more of what A. Etkind has called a *люкритакс* (i.e. a sort of nostalgia for the authentic which supposedly resides in the popular tradition)<sup>131</sup> than a re-working of the 19th century populist missionary project.<sup>132</sup>

The increase in the number of believers was dramatic in the 1960s, in part following the removal of N.S. Khrushchev from power and a change in the Party's policy in relation to the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>133</sup> The seeming loosening of the state's grip on the Orthodox Church was a direct consequence of the dissatisfaction with the outcomes of Khrushchev's repressive policy, when various sects, more

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Although A.Etkind uses the term as a framework for the analysis of this relationship at the turn of the century, I believe it is also useful for the discussion of the Soviet dissident movement:

"[Люкритакс]... неутомимая тяга человека элитарной культуры ко всему настоящему, подлинному и первоначальному, а также отрицание им собственной культуры как неподлинной и ненастоящей." (A.Etkind, *Khlyst: Sekty, literatura i revolyutsiya* (NLO: Moskva, 1998), p.166.

<sup>132</sup> Though 'missionary activity' was in fact listed as one of the objectives of the religious-philosophical seminar, as will be discussed below. The "missionary trips to the provinces", however, were made in order to find and support the like-minded individuals with interests in religion in order to create a religious community that would go beyond the intellectual circles in the capitals. (*Vol'noe slovo*, 39)

<sup>133</sup> P.Reddaway, "Policy Toward Dissent Since Khrushchev" in T.H.Rigby, A.Brown, P.Reddaway, eds., *Authority, Power and Policy in the USSR* (Macmillan: London, 1980), p. 163.



evasive to outside supervision and control due to the atomised and flexible internal structure, attracted increasing numbers of people. Thus, it was a shift to "bureaucratic control", a cornerstone of Brezhnev's policy in most spheres, that made at least a semblance of religious freedom possible.<sup>134</sup> The attitude of the state to its citizens was characterized by a very thorough documenting of citizens' political activities, with periods of non-interference on the part of the state, that were probably meant to dissociate the new regime from the excesses of the Khrushchev era. The more tolerant stance on the emerging religious and national consciousness was also due to the fact that a considerable faction of the Communist and Komsomol leadership consisted of those who sympathised with national bolshevism.

As a critic of contemporary Russian nationalism argued, nationalist trends in the late 1960s originated on two social levels, just as did in the 19th century, in the Establishment Right and the Dissident Right.<sup>135</sup> Although the relationship between these two directions may be initially characterized as that of "ferocious hatred for each other", gradually through a process of painful mutual concessions, a rapprochement occurred and the more noble aspirations of the intellectuals' nationalism got mobilized to support the oppressive nationalist policies of the imperial state. Yanov demonstrates, what he considers the degradation of the progressive Slavophile thought, with its commitment to the struggle with despotism, into the Panslavism of the 1870s, which devoted itself to the apologia on behalf of the same despotism.<sup>136</sup>

The prominence of messianism in the Russian nationalist consciousness has been largely associated with Slavophile thought. Abandoned in post-Petrine times, the "apocalyptic messianism of the Old Russian national myth", spurned by the secular

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<sup>134</sup> F. Corley, *Religion in the Soviet Union. An Archival Reader* (Macmillan: London, 1996), p.244.

<sup>135</sup> A. Yanov, *The Russian New Right* (Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 1978), pp.4-6.

imperial state, was revived by Bakunin and taken up by the Slavophiles.<sup>137</sup> One author argued that national consciousness had not developed until the middle of the nineteenth century due to the "huge effort expended on building the Russian Empire" that had "impeded the attempt to create a Russian nation".<sup>138</sup> The rhetoric of messianism with the emphasis on the cultural-historic prophecy in the later Slavophile thought aimed at retrieving the national consciousness. The superiority of the Russian nation was to be asserted on the basis of spiritual excellence and of traditional purity.

Many, both within and outside the Slavophile circles, upheld the primacy of spiritual and cultural factors over political and economical ones in determining the development of the nation. The authors of *Vekhi* (1909), an influential collection of articles that initiated a critical re-appraisal of the role of the populist movement and intelligentsia's involvement in the political life of the country, could hardly be termed Slavophiles. The authors in the collection (among them N.Berdyayev, S.Frank, P. Struve) spoke of the intelligentsia's responsibility for the chaos of the 1905 revolution. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, as one historian shows, to a great extent adopted the same critical attitude toward the role of the intelligentsia in Russian history.<sup>139</sup> In the collection *From Under the Rubble*, edited by Solzhenitsyn, he maintained that "social change in the USSR could only occur as individuals started to regard themselves as fully responsible for the social evils and make sacrifices on that basis".<sup>140</sup>

Following Frank, Solzhenitsyn discarded both the economic achievement and the structure of the state as indicators of the nation's development, maintaining that these were secondary to the intensity and leading principle of nation's spiritual life. As

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p.86.

<sup>137</sup> G. Hosking, "Empire and Nation-Building in Late Imperial Russia", p. 24

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>139</sup> P. Boobbyer, "Russian Liberal Conservatism" in G. Hosking and R. Service, eds.

has been noted, Solzhenitsyn echoes Frank's assertion that sobornost', by which he meant the spiritual life of the community, always determined obshchestvennost', i.e. "the external arrangements of the society".<sup>141</sup> If the specific internal spirit of human relations governs the community, it then becomes clear why each nation should have a specific spiritual history. As Solzhenitsyn believed, Russia's specific spiritual history was "the inescapable destiny of common repentance", as "the nation was mystically welded together in a community of guilt".<sup>142</sup> This insistence of influential Russian thinkers on individual responsibility, and their refusal to root the social evil in the social structures and economic polities, shed light on the Russian feminists' unequivocal refusal to rely on the rhetoric of social reformation, as well as their refusal to appropriate a Western individualistic discourse of human rights, and their decision instead to pursue a nation-related discourse on the mission of woman in society.

The striking emphasis on the idea of suffering among the Russian intelligentsia attracted many commentators' attention. A pivotal concept in Russian Orthodoxy, where it is a prerequisite of redemption, suffering is also featured in social commentary literature, where it is granted the status of purgatory on earth, and, thus, it is perceived as the road to the higher Truth (*Истина*). However, it is important to analyse these tendencies toward self-martyrdom with a sense of each specific historical situation, so that claims of continuity of political thought or cultural tradition are based on more than one sweeping assumption about the national character. D. Rancour-Lafferriere in his *The Slave Soul of Russia* does exactly the opposite resting his whole case on an assumption about the eternal masochism of the

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<sup>140</sup> A. Solzhenitsyn, "Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations" quoted in P. Boobbyer, p. 39.

Russian national character, equally pervasive among the peasantry and intelligentsia, and identical ten centuries ago, or during the present era.<sup>143</sup>

Self-sacrifice and humility were the cornerstones of the populist programme and, in fact, the presence of these Christian ideals in the thought of Russian radical youth attracted the comment of many authors.<sup>144</sup> It has been noted that apart from the mentioned ideals it was also the commitment to the cause that was the crucial element in the intelligentsia identity that gave that social group a quality of the secular religion.<sup>145</sup>

Rancour-Lafferier dismisses the religious element in the populist culture, suggesting that it was primarily masochism and self-destruction that intelligentsia manifested in its going to the people. Refuting G. Fedotov's assumption that populism developed its own version of Christianity, Rancour-Lafferiere believes "it is simply false to attribute covert Christianity to a declared atheist".<sup>146</sup> Of special interest is Rancour-Lafferier's treatment of the Slavophiles who, in his opinion, took up "the notion of Russian slavishness", in this context, toward the European nations. Although "generally the Slavophiles were uncomfortable with Russian slavishness" and "at times they would even try to deny the existence of Slavish attitudes in Russians", they failed to produce an alternative vision of the Russian's attitude to his freedom. Rancour-Lafferiere finds the Slavophile thought it reinforcing the notion of Russian servility in its attempt to relate individual's freedom to his function in the community.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>142</sup> Solzhenitsyn in Boobbyer, p. 41.

<sup>143</sup> D. Rancour-Lafferiere, *The Slave Soul of Russia. Moral Masochism and the Cult of Suffering* (New York University Press: New York and London, 1995).

<sup>144</sup> N. Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (Darton, Longman, Todd: London, 1963).

<sup>145</sup> Nicolas Zernov quotes Harold Williams from his *Russia of the Russians*: "The intelligentsia bore the characteristics of a religious body rather than a literary class. Its attitude resembled that of the Puritans and their successors. It had a Non-Conformist conscience, but the ideal pursued was not of the salvation of the individual soul, but the salvation of the Russian people." Zernov, p. 4.

Slavophiles believed that the village community presented the alternative way of social development for Russian peasantry, where the community itself will take the major decisions, although that would entail a strict submission to the pronouncements of the elected elders in both economic and moral decisions. Rancour-Lafferiere finds the idea of freedom in submission to the community extremely ambivalent: "It was asserted [by the Slavophiles] that Russians could be free even when enslaved (or when subjected to what looked like slavery to a Western observer)." Indeed, the idea of the inner freedom co-existing with the external non-freedom may appear problematic to any worldview that places individual in the center of its analysis. However, it is important to remember that Slavophiles in their vision of the ideal Russian society were trying to counter both the history of serfdom (compared to which community pressures may indeed appear far less oppressive) and the upcoming urbanization with its destruction of the traditional values and morals (where community is again the guarantor of the society's spiritual health). This also sheds light on the nationalist dissidents' interest in the community and its potential for an alternative association of people.

Both for the Slavophiles and for the nationalist dissidents, religion, whether confessional or not, appeared to be the only framework that allowed for a spiritual creativity in the atheistic world. The belief that Western democracy had brought the Western world to the state where it was "bogged in vices" (*[Запад] погрязший в зпexax*) served as a rationale for the belief in the superiority of Russian spiritual tradition. This nationalist stance gathered momentum with the spread of a belief that Marxism itself, and the materialistic worldview correlative with it, had been imposed on Russia, that they were in fact alien to the course of Russian history and that in spirit they were a Western creation.<sup>147</sup> The establishment of Marxism in power could only have been carried out with international help, especially from those nations that had always been hostile to the imperial Russia.

The ghost of international interference as well as celebration of isolationism and messianism had been equally present in Eurasianism, a nationalist trend of political thought which also believed in the superiority of Russia and its traditi

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<sup>146</sup> Rancour-Lafferiere, p. 45.

<sup>147</sup> E. Ternovskii, p. 15.

rejected Western individualist values.<sup>148</sup> The concept of Scythianism, central to Eurasianism, as expounded by Ivanov-Razumnik and A. Blok, was influenced by Vl. Solov'ev's eschatology. Scythianism was to defeat Antichrist in the coming cosmic struggle.<sup>149</sup> It was fascination with the Asian cultures for their ability to remain indifferent to the West that equally attracted Blok and later thinkers. Eurasians preferred to redefine the course of Russian history as having closer links with the East and to question the validity of Russian social reformers' attempts to follow the political tradition of the West.

Eurasianism was a pronounced influence on V. Chalmaev, one of the nationalist authors who re-ignited the Slavophiles/Westernizers debate by writing an article (published in a solid journal *Molodaya Gvardiya*, September 1968) in which he asserted in similarly apocalyptic terms that Russian history had crystallized the unique spirit ready for the last decisive battle with "Americanism".<sup>150</sup>

The awakening of national consciousness had swiftly acquired nationalist overtones, which caused a wave of criticism from both liberal democratic dissenters within the Soviet Union (e.g., Andrey Amal'rik, Aleksandr Yanov) and, predictably, from Western commentators. For instance, F.J.M. Feldbrugge, the author of a systematic study on Samizdat, rebuked dissident authors for being russocentric, as well as for their view that the problems of Soviet political structure were presented as "Russian problems". Feldbrugge even rushed to subsume the whole mass of samizdat works under the national religious trend of Soviet dissent: "[in samizdat] there is an almost total preoccupation with the past, the present and the future of the Russian people and its place in history and the world."<sup>151</sup>

Dissidents critical of the nation- and tradition-centred (национально-почвенный) movement explained the vitality of national elements in religious guise as either an aftermath of the Marxist-Leninist influence (like A. Amal'rik in *Доживет ли Советский Союз до 1984 года?*) or, as an inevitable stage in the development of a collective religious consciousness (e.g., Ternovskii, D.Pospelovskii, L.Konin).

Inevitably, the discussion of the relevance of the national idea and of religious elements in the struggle for a social transformation in Russia referred back to "the Slavophile debate" in both its early and late nineteenth century stages. As has been noted, A. Yanov preferred to see the dynamic of Slavophile thought coming to a halt by the end of the previous century, degenerating into a pan-Slavic movement complicit with the national policies of the Russian autocracy. The neo-Slavophiles of the 1970s were predicted by Yanov to fall shortly into the same trap and end up collaborating with the Soviet authoritarian regime, since forces and voluntary emigration as well as arrests of its most sober figures had left the movement without a spiritual guide.<sup>152</sup> To respond to the accusations of the degeneration of Slavophile thought, the beginning of the century was invoked again:

"It was the Slavophile movement that generated the intellectual and spiritual revival of Orthodox Theology, which was a theology of liberal brand...It was the cradle of the Slavophile movement that gave rise to Vladimir Solov'ev and, to a great extent, to the entire Russian religious-philosophical movement of the beginning of this century, and, of course, to *Vekhi*, and most of all to Berdyaev, Frank and Struve."

<sup>148</sup> Peter J.S. Duncan, "Changing Landmarks? Anti-Westernism in National Bolshevism and Russian Revolutionary Thought" in G. Hosking and R. Service, eds.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>150</sup> A. Yanov, p. 45.

<sup>151</sup> F.J.M. Feldbrugge, p. 188.

<sup>152</sup> Yanov, p. 4-5.

(“Из славянофилов зародилось и появилось интеллектуально-духовное возрождение православного богословия, причем богословия либерального направления...Из колыбели славянофильства фактически вышел и Владимир Соловьев, и все русское религиозно-философское движение начала века в большей степени, и, конечно, *Вехи*, и прежде всего Бердяев, Франк и Струве.”)<sup>153</sup>

Whatever the predictions for the revival of religious and nationalist thought were, one fact was undeniable: the interest in observing religious rituals had reached its peak in post-Stalinist times. According to a report of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (the principal supervising body for the religious activities) dating from 1965, as many as 180 000 people had attended the Christmas Eve service in the churches of Moscow. By the end of the same year protest activities against the restrictions on both Baptists and Orthodox Christians (suspended throughout the anti-religious campaign 1959-1964) resumed. In November, 1965, Fathers Gleb Yakunin and Nikolai Eshliman addressed an open letter to the Patriarch, in which they criticized the lack of religious freedom and state-imposed constraints of the Russian Orthodox Church. Possibly it was the letters by these two Moscow priests that "inaugurated what would become a flood of *samizdat* documents and protests by religious believers".<sup>154</sup> Whether or not all religious *samizdat* owed its inception to the events of 1965 and the following wave of arrests, is debatable, for *samizdat* featured a wide range of topics presented by authors of diverse beliefs and convictions. However, it is true that beginning with the second half of the 1960s, religious activities in the Soviet Union were well documented in the *samizdat* press, and continuously discussed both inside and outside the Soviet Union.

*Samizdat* and reports of dissident activities published in the West by no means offer identical evidence; for the sake of clarity, this essay will rely for the most part on

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<sup>153</sup> E.Ternovsky, p. 12.

<sup>154</sup> F.Corley, p. 244.

publications in the journal *Посев* and its appendix *Вольное слово*. *Посев* reprinted many documents from *samizdat*, while conversely, materials from here found their way into *samizdat*. Publications by emigre Russian thinkers in *Посев* offer invaluable evidence for my discussion of these thinkers' influence on the dissident movement, providing documentation of a unique and systematic discussion of religious and national problems that cannot be as easily obtained from the in any case incomplete *Samizdat* archives. That said some practical problems remain. As most dissident writers (working in exceptionally difficult and dangerous conditions) did not systematically footnote their work or even sometimes did not give precise references, some of the argument here has had to be based on inference and informed suggestion.

The collocation "religious revival", or, "religious Renaissance" became frequently used by the end of the 1970s and is thought to have originated in the sermons of Fr Dmitriy Dudko several years before.<sup>155</sup> The religious intelligentsia's reworking of the term applied to the turn-of-the-century religious thought in the keeping with the intense interest in the works of Vl. Solov'ev, N.Berdyaev, P.Florensky, S.Bulgakov, and other figures prominent in the "new religious consciousness" as well as in the writings of their successors in the 'First Wave' emigration (e.g. G.Fedotov, L.Shestov, the later Berdyaev). Whether the term "religious Renaissance" was espoused or contested, discussions referred, at least implicitly, to the religious and philosophical concerns of the pre-Revolutionary Russian religious thought. Often, conscious parallels were drawn with the beginning of the century to show the process of rapprochement between the intelligentsia and the Orthodox Church. Tatyana Goricheva, for instance, asserted that "the age-old masquerade" ("вековой маскарад") had ended for the intelligentsia of the 1970s. She illustrated her point with



a reference (no footnote is given by her) to G.P. Fedotov's description of a similar process several decades before:

"It is strikingly evident – at least, in the city – how many of the former intelligentsia are in the churches today...these are all the former populists, yesterday's socialist revolutionaries...Finally, the generations of "saints that did not believe in God" have found their God and together with him have found themselves. The age-old masquerade has ended".

("Уже сразу бросается в глаза - по крайней мере в городе - как много в храмах бывшей интеллигенции...это все бывшие народники, вчерашние эсеры...Наконец-то поколения "святых, не верующих в Бога", нашли своего Бога и вместе с ним нашли себя. Вековой маскарад кончился.")<sup>156</sup>

The intellectual heritage of the turn-of-the century thinkers to which the dissidents of the 1970s felt themselves heirs, was regarded as an important direction in the search for a worldview alternative to Marxism:

"One of the important symptoms of the new ideological quest in Russia is the increased interest in the Russian religious philosophy of the first half of the 20th century, which has acquired the name of 'the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance'"

("Одним из важных симптомов новых идеологических исканий в России является повышенный интерес к русской религиозной философии первой половины XX века, получившей название 'Русского религиозно-философского ренессанса'.")<sup>157</sup>

As was mentioned above, some were repelled by the "vices of 'historical Christianity'"<sup>158</sup> (another collocation borrowed from the turn of the century): what this particularly meant was the collaboration of the Orthodox hierarchy with the KGB, the age-old dependence of the Church upon the state, the complete indifference of the Church clergy to the fates of believers who were often persecuted on religious grounds. All these points figured as vital causes of the intelligentsia's uneasiness with the institution of Orthodox Church. This often meant that their religious and spiritual quest was channelled into broader frameworks of pronounced "non-confessional monotheism" or religious philosophy, yoga and existentialism.<sup>159</sup> Disappointed by the

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<sup>155</sup> E. Ternovsky, p. 16.

<sup>156</sup> In T. Goricheva, "O neofitsial'noi kul'ture i Tserkvi", Posev, 9, 1979, p. 47.

<sup>157</sup> S. Levitskii, "Ob odnoi blagorodnoi utopii", Posev, 1, 1980, p. 47.

<sup>158</sup> E. Ternovsky, p. 16.

<sup>159</sup> This was of course yet another connection with the world of the early twentieth century, when the occult equally appealed to artists, philosophers, writers and politicians, and figures such as Elena

behind-the-scene manoeuvres of the priesthood, some of the intelligentsia abandoned their religious beliefs entirely, but not their opposition to the regime, and became politically active in the democratic movement.

Sectarian unorthodox teachings continued to attract broad segments of population outside the capitals, a fact that, although very well documented in the West, continued to be almost entirely ignored by the dissidents. Often no thorough analysis was made of the popularity of religious practices outside the Russian Orthodox Church and the influence of sects among the people (the same *народ*, on whose behalf the religious renaissance had been announced), was attributed to the lack of the Orthodox presence in the regions. Frustrated with the intelligentsia's inability to see beyond its own concerns, E. Ternovsky, an emigre author, an active contributor to the discussions of the *Posev*, entreated it to face the fact that sects were the real vessel of common people's belief:

"This fact often appears to the intelligentsia something marginal, unimportant, unconnected with the people, although even from these [western] documents it is easy to see that the overwhelming majority of sectarians come from the common people."

("[Интеллигенции] часто видится этот факт чем-то боковым, второстепенным, с народом не связанным, хотя даже по этим [западным] документам легко установить, что подавляющее большинство сектантов - как раз из простого народа.")<sup>160</sup>

A particularly important forum for the dissidents' discussions was the Religious-Philosophical Seminar, two sections of which sprang up independently in Moscow and Leningrad around the same time in the autumn of 1974. It was organised, like other dissident circles, around regular meetings/conferences, and publishing samizdat journals, *Община* in Moscow and *37* in Leningrad. In some ways it recalled, and was probably inspired by, the St Petersburg Religious-Philosophical assemblies of

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Blavatskaya and Rudolph Steiner exerted a huge influence. (For the prominence of the occult and esoteric teachings at the turn of the century in Russia see B.G. Rozenthal, *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, 1997).

<sup>160</sup> E. Ternovsky, p. 21.

1901-1903. After having enjoyed a relative freedom in the first years of its work, the Seminar was gradually suppressed, with its main figures all in labour camps or under investigation by 1980 (A.Ogorodnikov, Vl. Poresh, T. Shchipkova).

The joint committee of the different branches of the Seminar proclaimed one of its objectives, apart from theological education and communication of Christian love, as "serving the cause of the spiritual Revival of Russia" ("служение делу духовного Возрождения России").<sup>161</sup>

Although dedicated to the problems of the Orthodox worldview, the Seminar stressed the principle of plurality allowing an arena for discussions of authors as dissimilar as S.Frank and Max Weber, N.Berdyaev and Theodor Adorno, Vl. Solov'ev and Henri Marcuse, with an emphasis nonetheless on the Russian authors whose work primarily focused on religious problems. The Seminar was the first organized large-scale religious effort among young people in Soviet history, which was particularly important given the Komsomol's extreme intolerance of religious observance among the youth. The religious revival was said to have originated in the circles of the artistic intelligentsia (*khudozhestvennaya intelligentsiya*), just as most participants of the seminar were students or young people involved in arts:

"The first young believers were artists, poets and philosophers. The Religious-Philosophical Seminar, which was organized by creative intelligentsia two and a half years ago, bears the evidence of the unity of culture and religion."

("Первые молодые верующие - это художники, поэты и философы. Свидетельством единства культуры и религии является религиозно-философский семинар, организованный силами неофициальной творческой интеллигенции два с половиной года назад.")<sup>162</sup>

This close interrelatedness of culture and religion attracted both positive and negative assessments in the dissident circles. The permeation of culture with religious symbols resulted in a superficial fashionable involvement with ritual rather than a

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<sup>161</sup> *Posev*, 12, 1979.

<sup>162</sup> T. Goricheva, "Khristianstvo, Kul'tura, Politika", *Vol'noe slovo*, 39, p. 17.

profound belief, as well as a shallow understanding of the Scriptures. Goricheva complained that even "neighbour", *blizhnii* [as in Christ's commandment "Love your neighbour"] came to be understood as the nearest in space, whereas *dal'nii* (the opposite of neighbour, the stranger) is perceived as a remote and abstract otherness, which leads to indifference to the events outside the immediate circle of the intelligentsia:

"And no one wants to save the soul of a worldview, since everyone has realized the dubiousness and slyness of abstract ideas."

("...А спасать мировоззрение сегодня никому не хочется, поскольку все убедились в двусмысленности и коварстве абстрактных идей.")<sup>163</sup>

Another major obstacle to authentic religiosity in the intelligentsia was the pride and lack of genuine compunction in many individuals. The repentance, (*pokayanie*), of which Solzhenitsyn had spoken, would have entailed a dramatic change in the lifestyle of many, were the intelligentsia willing to undertake repentance at all. Instead, in the words of one critic from within the movement, "The Promethean mind as soon as it finds itself at the threshold of the Church strives not to change itself but Her, as it feels that by entering the Church it does Her a great favour." ("Прометеевское сознание, лишь оказавшись на пороге Церкви, стремится к тому, чтобы изменить не себя, а ее, оно чувствует, что входя в Церковь, делает ей великое одолжение.")<sup>164</sup>

Contrition on personal grounds as well as the need to shake off the pride of the secular world was what Seminar activists of this kind recommended to those who criticized the stagnation of the Russian Orthodox Church. Many of the members of the artistic professions, in Goricheva's opinion, had brought a false aestheticism and exaltation into their religious feelings, and actually gave up attending the Church in favour of talking and writing about it.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

The role of culture, and people involved in it, were not entirely dismissed by the members of the Seminar: its function was rather seen as that of purgatory, of a halfway stage on the intelligentsia's way to the Church. Culture with its secular temptations had to be overcome or made a means of serving God and the Church.<sup>165</sup> The acceptance of what might seem with hindsight to be a reduced function of culture, as a medium between the intelligentsia and Russian Orthodoxy, can be partly explained by the total lack of possibilities for self-expression and for recognition under the Soviet regime; the participation of culture in religious life was seen as beneficial for both and as broadening rather than narrowing the domain of culture. Enriched by culture and the creative act, religion could be revived, in tune with N. Berdyaev's belief (cited by Goricheva, one of the seminar participants) that social harmony could be attained through a new synthesis of Divine revelation and human creative genius:

"Culture affects religion in a sublimating way. It straightens religion up, refining it from naturalizing, magic and neurotic elements." ("Культура действует на религию 'сублимирующе'. Она выпрямляет ее, очищая от натурализации, магизма и неврозов.")<sup>166</sup>

The discussions of Russian turn-of-the-century philosophy by the members of the Seminar featured issues and themes related to theology as well as those related to the "Russian idea"; here was a strong emphasis on the individual and their experience in the alienated world. Out of the 38 documented sessions, at least 10 were devoted to the discussion of particular issues and problems in the works of Vl. Solov'yov, N. Berdyaev, P. Florenskii, S. Bulgakov, and S. Frank.<sup>167</sup>

Discontented with the absence of an active religious community, the religious-

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<sup>164</sup> T. Goricheva, "O neofitsial'noi kul'ture i Tserkvi", p. 47.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>166</sup> T. Goricheva, "Khristianstvo, Kul'tura, Politika", p. 19.

<sup>167</sup> *Vol'noe slovo*, 39.

philosophical seminar set out to attempt at "building that Christian synthesis which the modern atomized consciousness is seeking after" ("postroenie togo Khristianskogo sinteza, kotorogo skvoz' nesvobodu i tosku vzyshchet sovremennoe razorvanoe soznanie.").<sup>168</sup> The fact that seminars of the same name also appeared in Smolensk, Ufa, Kazan', Grodno, L'vov, Odessa and other cities, gave rise to the term "Christian youth movement" that announced itself dedicated to the restoration of spiritual and national historical memory of Russia.

The degree of importance attached to the cause of restoration of the Russian religious tradition, as opposed to the struggle for democracy or activities, subversive of the Soviet regime, is explained by the fact that, in the words of a dissent commentator, many dissidents shared a "belief that socialism is not an economic or political doctrine, but primarily an atheistic philosophy of life. This philosophy, according to them, is fully committed to the destruction of man as both a spiritual and physical being."<sup>169</sup> The dissidents' worldview saw the condition of an individual as due to spiritual problems that had to be resolved in solitude, rather than as the product of a social and political formation.

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<sup>168</sup> A.Ogorodnikov, "Kristianskii seminar", *Vol'noe slovo*, 39, p. 8.

<sup>169</sup> A.M. Mlikotin, "Existentialism and the Soviet Dissent" in A.M.Mlikotin, ed., p. 201.

## Chapter V. SOVIET WOMAN IN SEARCH OF LOST FEMININITY.

"When Svetlana Savitskaya floated into the orbiting Soviet space station, the pilot [Valentin Lebedev] handed her an apron, pointed her to the spaceship's kitchen and said, 'now you can cook.'"<sup>170</sup> This was probably one of the most telling illustrations of the prevalence of traditional views on male supremacy despite decades of emancipation. Promotions for women in the workplace were almost as exceptional as space flights and even those women who attained the higher ranks of power were still faced with an undiminishing multitude of household chores. At work was what became known as "kitchen-sink discrimination" where women themselves often argued, that it was " 'unmanly' for their husbands to do the washing-up".<sup>171</sup> Was it then "womanly" for the woman to work?

The focus of the first issue of *Woman and Russia* was exactly the conflict of demands on women as members of society and reproductive units, as well as heads of modern households. With the analysis of the current governing values in the "Editorial" as well as discussion of the various problems that women have to cope with, i.e. abortion, 'feminization' of men, and burn-out, the emphasis of the first issue of this underground publication could be summed up as the concern with the degradation of the relations between sexes due to a loss of understanding of the vocation and mission of the sexes.

Ironically, the same concerns were felt and aired by state bodies, exemplified in the so-called 'ideological work' also known by the name of 'propaganda', although the interest of the state in this sphere was prompted by the threat to its extreme concern, that of population replenishment. It was feared that birth rate decline would

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<sup>170</sup> Radio "Liberty" Research report. August, 24, 1982. RA 300/80/1/231.

<sup>171</sup> "Kitchen-Sink Discrimination", *The Economist*, July, 10, 1982.

undermine the labour force equilibrium within the next generation. As demographers suggested, the efficient replenishment of the population would demand a birth rate of 2,8 children per family.<sup>172</sup>

According to one commentary on the women's situation in the Soviet Union, the main contribution of the Brezhnev era (1964 - 1982) to the woman question was the recognition of the fact that, contrary to previous constitutional statements, it had not been solved.<sup>173</sup> Night shifts for women remained a common practice, whilst women's workload at home and on the job was estimated to exceed that of men by at least 15 to 20%.<sup>174</sup> The same source voiced a complaint over the budget distribution, which put the Russian federation at a disadvantage when it came to the welfare and family-support services.<sup>175</sup> Thus, the Party tacitly expressed concern for the well being of the Russian woman, which resulted in the 1981 ban on jobs involving health risks, such as lifting heavy objects. Needless to say, it was reproductive health that was at stake. Moves were made to develop the system of childcare and playschool facilities. The growing concern for women and family was explicitly linked to the program of countering the falling birth rate by the state, as the materials of the 26th Communist Party Congress reveal.<sup>176</sup>

The 1970s witnessed the appearance of research that suggested that while women were more successfully drawn into the labour force than ever, they continued to be severely overburdened at home.<sup>177</sup> It was increasingly obvious that women's

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<sup>172</sup> J.B.Dunlop, p. 99.

<sup>173</sup> M. Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Harvester Wheatsheaf: New York, 1989), p. 166.

<sup>174</sup> G.I. Litvinova, B. Ts. Uralnis, abstract published in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XXXIV, No 19, June 9, 1982, p. 1.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1. On the explicit linkage of the population problem with the woman question also see M. Buckley (1989), pp. 161- 179.

<sup>177</sup> The exact amount of time expended at household chores by women as compared to men apparently varied significantly across regions and social groups. However, even in Moscow, a survey displayed



involvement in the labour force had led them to avoid their reproductive duties. The divorce rate and dysfunctions of the family were another immediate concern of the public discourse of the time, carried out in such influential periodicals as *Literaturnaya gazeta*, *Nedelya*, *Rabotnitsa*, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, *Yunost'* and *Literaturnoe obozrenie*. The remarkable presence of the periodicals dedicated to literary issues and providing a forum mainly for writers (*Literaturnaya gazeta*, *Yunost'*, *Literaturnoe obozrenie*) in this discussion shows that the deterioration of the family in modern urban settings was seen as a major Russian national problem.

Divorce was pronounced to be a tragedy for women, not merely for the state, since "fewer than 50% of divorced women remarry and most ... have no more children."<sup>178</sup> The problem of the single woman and divorce rate began to be referred to as the direct consequence of the overly enthusiastic emancipation of the weaker sex.<sup>179</sup>

To counter the problem of the population decline, the program of resurrection of traditional ideas of gender roles began to be perceptible outside the pedagogical discourse.<sup>180</sup> The tacit fusion of women and family into one reproductive unit by the vehicles of ideology resulted in a sense of urgency towards the restoration of femininity, now endangered by the progress of the industrial society. Two sets of

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staggering figures: women's weekly expenditure on preparing meals constituted 10-12 hours vs 1-1,5 for men; purchasing food 6 and 3 hours, washing up 20-30 and 6 minutes, and cleaning the household 4 and 1 hours correspondingly. See Z. Yankova, "Zhenshchina na rabote i doma" in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, No 10, March, 5, 1980, p. 11.

<sup>178</sup> V. Perevedentsev, "Ne soshlis' kharakterami", *Literaturnaya gazeta* February, 15, 1978, p. 13. Quoted from L. Attwood *The New Soviet Man and Woman: Sex-role Socialization in the USSR* (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, 1990) p. 4.

<sup>179</sup> For instance, see G. Naan, "Emansipatsiya, patriarkhat i 'voina polov' ", *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, No 9, 1977, pp. 57-62; D. Akivis, Valentin Sergeev, "Nezamuzhnyaya zhenshchina", *Zhurnalist*, No 7, 1981.

*Literaturnaya gazeta*, November, 24, 1976.

<sup>180</sup> L. Attwood, *The New Soviet Man and Woman: Sex-role Socialization in the USSR* (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, 1990), p. 165.

problems emerged out of the re-evaluation of the state of femininity in the Soviet Union: that women were increasingly failing to combine their productive and reproductive functions and that the loss of traditional feminine qualities was to account for the deterioration of the family. Although the arguments certainly went beyond these two strands, I will show that these major preoccupations permeated the discussion of the population problem. Interestingly, concerns similar to these can be found in T.Goricheva's article, raising the issue of the feminization of men, as well as in the "Appeal" of the first issue of *Woman and Russia*, where reasons for women's refusal to give birth are examined.<sup>181</sup>

Apart from sociological research revealing the unfair distribution of labour, which amounted to women's greater expenditures of time and energy, and, therefore, lack of time for recreation and child-rearing, throughout the late 1970s discussions in the press were often initiated by letters from women to newspapers in which they explicitly stated the presence of a conflicting relationship between the status of a working woman and that of a mother. Thus, throughout 1979, according to the radio "Liberty" report, a number of materials appeared in the Soviet periodicals, which discussed the problem of the birth rate decline through the discussion of letters from working mothers.<sup>182</sup> In February of that year *Sovetskaya Rossiya* published a letter from a woman, explaining the reasons for deciding against having her third child, together with a commentary by a sociologist.<sup>183</sup> A series of articles throughout the same year in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* featured responses to the article on the

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<sup>181</sup> T. Goricheva, "Raduisya, slez evinykh izbavlenie", and "Eti dobrye patriarkhal'nye ustoi" (signed by "editors of the almanach") in *Zhenshchina i Rossiya* No 1, AS 300/85/19/17, pp. 12-22 and pp. 3-12.

<sup>182</sup> "Budet li oblegcheno polozhenie rabotayushchikh materei" in Radio "Liberty" Research, RS 107/79. RA 300/80/1/231, p. 1.

<sup>183</sup> *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, February, 10, 1979.

problems arising in a family after the birth of the second child.<sup>184</sup> Even *Pravda* (the publication dedicated to channelling the Communist Party policies) participated in the debate, although with a more openly pro-natal stance, where a demographer A. Vishveskii participated with the article "Извечная ценность" ("The Eternal Value of Family") to come back three months later with the analysis of the readers' responses.<sup>185</sup> As the report by the radio "Liberty" researchers stated, this was only a part of the campaign for a more active demographic policy. The campaigners maintained that the normal development of the Soviet society was threatened by the current shift from the three-child to the two-child family.<sup>186</sup> Or, as somewhat less subtly maintained other authors, the fate of the nation was endangered. A letter from a female textile worker to *Izvestiya* (another major national newspaper) listed the problems that the families with a small child faced and concluded that the situation did not merely affect the couples' decisions on having more children, but also threatened "the interests of the society" and "the fate of the nation".<sup>187</sup>

Another threat to the national interest was the deterioration of the family, manifest in high divorce rates, and perceived as the outcome of the transformation that gender roles had undergone. In other words, the process of masculinization of the emancipated women was seen as threatening the sensitive masculinities of the Soviet men. Feminization of men became an issue no less than masculinization of women, although one would think these two processes could counter one another and, so to say, a gender balance could be established.

However, various guardians of gender roles came forward, linking the ill-defined notions of femininity and masculinity to larger social, political and nationalist

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<sup>184</sup> *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, April, 18; May, 29; June, 12, 1979.

<sup>185</sup> *Pravda*, April, 2; July, 8, 1979.

frameworks. Thus, pedagogical science contributed by providing a link between "feminization of men" and men's anti-social behaviour.<sup>188</sup> According to L. Attwood, who examined the Soviet pedagogical and psychological discourse throughout several decades, by the 1970s the concern with the "natural roles" of men and women could be correlated with "certain political, social and demographic concerns, which also emerged as a major preoccupation of the late 1970s. The stress placed on the 'biological basis' of male and female personality differences and the insistence on their inevitability...can be interpreted as a reflection of alarm over perceived 'feminization' of men and 'masculinization' of women."<sup>189</sup> As M. Buckley has pointed out, femininity became the focus of the ideological work: it was observed that women were emotional, gentle, delicate, thoughtful, kind, sensitive and understanding. "The existence of these important differences led theorists to conclude that communism would not eliminate the division of labour between the sexes."<sup>190</sup> Until the early 1980s when the ban on hiring women for heavy jobs was introduced, the division of labour into male and female remained hypocritically limited to the domestic sphere. There it was guarded vigilantly, accounted for by the aptitude and linked to the threat of a loss of the "natural" virility through undertaking cooking and washing up. Instead a new men's virtue was fostered as part of the schoolboys' upbringing, i.e. men were good husbands if they agreed to offer women their "help about the house". This opinion of a male sociologist, published in a collection of interviews with Soviet social scientists, can serve as a summary of the popular stance:

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<sup>186</sup> RS 107/79. RA 300/80/1/231, p. 2.

<sup>187</sup> M. Kalyuzhnaya, "Skol'ko imet' detei", *Izvestiya*, March, 10, 1979, p.3.

<sup>188</sup> L. Attwood, p. 8.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>190</sup> M. Buckley, 1989, p. 175.

"Men are interested in more intellectual matters...It is better for women to cook and wash for the child, while the men devote themselves to the intellectual aspects of a child's upbringing...Some roles women perform better than men. It is better for men than women to teach art or sports to the child. Each brings their own qualities to the upbringing of a child, consistent with their sex."<sup>191</sup>

Although this view clearly reveals a belief in the existence of sex-related aptitudes and limitations, the same interviewee stressed that lest the formation of the right gender persona goes awry, "fathers should spend time with their sons, and mothers with their daughters."<sup>192</sup> Thus, the gender roles remained to be seen as biologically rooted, but at the same time endangered by women's claims to leadership in the family. Ambition and competitiveness, especially if women were competing with men, became increasingly related to what was perceived by a number of authors as 'masculinization' of women.

Already in the 1960s the process of a shift in the family power structure was occurring, from the man's unquestionable status as the head of the family towards the recognition of either the husband's or the wife's personal qualities making them suitable for leadership.<sup>193</sup> According to the data of the 1970 women, about one quarter of all families governed USSR population census. However, these figures, as the same survey suggested, reflect the tragic over-representation of one-parent families, i.e. families headed by a single or divorced mother.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, as one female author put it, even if a woman was the head of a two-parent family, such situation only harmed her interests: men were not prepared to take up the household chores and the woman ended up with most of the physical work and responsibility on her shoulders.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> M. Buckley, ed. *Soviet Social Scientists Talking: An Official Debate About Women* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 35.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>193</sup> Z. Yankova quotes research results by a sociologist A.L. Pimenova. In "Zhenshchina na rabote i doma", *Literaturnaya gazeta*, March, 5, 1980, p.11.

<sup>194</sup> G. Naan, p. 57.

<sup>195</sup> E.M. Zuikova, "Obshchestvenno-proizvoditel'naya deyatel'nost' zhenshchin i sem'ya", *Vestnik moskovskogo universiteta series 12*, No.3, 1982, pp. 15-21.

According to one survey, about 15 to 30% of women claimed the role of the family leader, whereas only 2 to 4% of men were prepared to put up with that claim.<sup>196</sup> The argument that came to the surface of the discussions on the family rôles most frequently, was that leadership in the family brought the woman to compete with the man and made her unwomanly. Thus, one of the Soviet sociologists interviewed by M.Buckley articulated his uneasiness with this process as linked to the gender problems:

"We must maintain the differences between the sexes and keep feminine charm. I want to see women stay women in the future. The masculinization of women is something negative. And men do not want to lower their own position in the family."<sup>197</sup>

Thus, when voices were raised against the growing number of women heading, or aspiring to head, households, the assumption was that such aspirations were part of the misconceived role of the woman which would in time lead to poor parenthood, divorce and refusal to produce more children.<sup>198</sup> The process of involvement into professional life did not merely take time from the family but also hampered the woman's gender identity:

"When cultivating in the woman the characteristics ...[like] firmness, steadfastness, intolerance, rationality, and a grasp of business, we must be clearly aware that we are certainly reconstructing her emotional balance and contracting her purely maternal qualities."<sup>199</sup>

Apart from the destructive characteristics fostered by women's striving for advancement in professions, it was, above all, the frustration that men felt in case their wives achieved the desired success and thus became the major supporters of the family. The popular sentiment was that men were frustrated at not being the

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<sup>196</sup> G.Naan, p. 57.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>198</sup> L.Attwood, p. 3.

<sup>199</sup> G. Belskaya, "Otkuda berutsya plokhie zheny", *Literaturnaya gazeta*, September, 7, 1977, p. 12. Quoted from L.Attwood, p. 167.

breadwinners, which fact in turn took the responsibility off their shoulders.<sup>200</sup> Masculinity was thus seen as severely damaged by the process whereby women took the leading role as family supporters and in return expected the men to contribute to the running of the household. Women's appeals to men's conscience, urging the latter to take up some of the chores, did not exert much sympathy from the Soviet theorists of the marriage dysfunction. Due to a "false understanding of equality", women expected that men would demonstrate kindness, tact and sensitivity were not consistent with men's own image of masculinity and, therefore, would pressurize them even further.<sup>201</sup>

Sexual equality and the conflict of interests in the family came under examination. Legal emancipation of women was doubtless at work in the Soviet society, and its achievements were impressive, but a suspicion was sneaking in that emancipation did not stop once its aim was reached. As an ongoing process, driven by the force of inertia, it would not stop at the moment of perfect equilibrium, but would keep sowing the seeds of discontent in the psyche of the modern woman.<sup>202</sup> Equality as a concept came under the scrutiny of the public discussion with the result of a curious split of the concept into the notion of equal rights and that of ultimate equality, i.e. a distinction became perceptible between *ravnopravie* and *ravenstvo*.<sup>203</sup> Other new terms like "new patriarchy", signifying the new dominating position of the woman, and slogans like "take care of men!" started to surface in literary and popular discourses.<sup>204</sup> Unsurprisingly, both these instances of attacks on emancipation were

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<sup>200</sup> L.Attwood, p. 167.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>202</sup> G.Naan, p. 58.

<sup>203</sup> M.Buckley, 1989, pp. 163-164.

<sup>204</sup> On the dangers of the "new patriarchy" see G.Naan, p.58; on the unheard-of before appeal "take care of men!" see A.Strelyanyi, "Perestavilsya li svet?", *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1997, No 5, (pp. 51-55), p. 54.

linked to the demographic problems. The existence of the "new patriarchy" was supported by the figures showing women's refusal to keep up with men's expectations of the number of children in the family. Thus G.Naan argues that since

"The husbands' need of children is not fulfilled in any of the [Soviet] Union republics <...> It is unlikely that in solving other less vital issues the husband's rights are given any more substantial respect. This is not merely emancipation. Obvious become the elements of the new patriarchy."

(“Потребность мужей в детях не удовлетворяется ни в одной союзной республике...Вряд ли можно предполагать, что в решении менее важных вопросов права мужа уважаются существенно больше. Это уже не просто эмансипация. Налицо элементы нового патриархата.”)<sup>205</sup>

The appeal to "take care of men" ("Берегите мужчин") also came into existence due to the awareness that despite some three decades elapsing since the end of World War II, adult men were still in great deficit. The same census of 1970 revealed that there were 1,7 unmarried women per 1 unmarried man. Although the higher mortality rate for relatively young men could be related to self-destructive behaviour, like alcoholism and, therefore, a higher rate of accidents with lethal outcomes, blaming women for aggravating the situation and not taking better care of men was not unusual. The male characters in the novels and stories of the writer, Vassiliy Belov, for instance, are shown as experiencing medical conditions suggestive of heart problems every time there is a problem in the relationship with the wife.<sup>206</sup>

A writer Vil' Lipatov in his "Novel with no title, no plot and no ending" (*Повесть без названия, сюжета и конца*) shows a successful woman who despite no apparent shortcomings causes her second husband's and her own unhappiness.

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<sup>205</sup> G.Naan, p. 58.

<sup>206</sup> V.Belov, "Svidaniya po utram", where the character's "pain, hurt and bitterness at the wife are adding up under the left shoulderblade"; "Kanuny", where the character pronounces the prophecy about the death of the nation where wives turn against husbands and at that, "breathed rarely and heavily", and his "face got wrinkled in a martyr-like manner". Quoted in A.Strelyanyi, p. 57. Strelyanyi himself does



Because of Nina Aleksandrovna's social status in her community - although only a teacher in a village she is respected by people - it is she rather than her husband who is given an apartment by the municipal bodies and it is her who manages the family. The husband objects to this situation only indirectly, by showing that he is emotionally uncomfortable with her decision-making status. All of a sudden the husband suffers a fit of stomach ulcers that has not bothered him for a long time.<sup>207</sup> Larissa Kuznetsova, an active contributor to the debate on the status of the modern family in the 1970s and early 1980s, while commenting on this novel predicted that the disease of the fictional character with the help of ambitious women will afflict many good men (who were already in high demand):

"It seems not with one heart stroke, not with one case of ulcers will clever, good and handsome men have to pay for the shock of confronting clever, strong and independent women."

("Видно, не одним еще инфарктом, не одной язвой будут платить умные, хорошие и красивые мужчины за шок столкновения с умной, сильной и самостоятельной женщиной.")<sup>208</sup>

Another author concerned with the problems of men's health and divorce and surprisingly willing to admit the unpleasant statistics of men's alcohol abuse as a key reason for many a divorce case, preferred to see women themselves as a problem. Hypocritically making use of the French slogan "Cherchez la femme!", Yu. Slobodkin suggested that the longevity of men's alcohol abuse was to be accounted for by the now widespread habit of drinking in women.<sup>209</sup> But above all, it was that women, for whatever reason they were initiating divorce, were turning against their sacred mission of motherhood and that even in the atheistic state was regarded as a sign of apocalypse. The dissolution of the traditional hierarchies, even if tacitly, became related to the destiny of the Russian nation. V. Belov wrote in his novel *Кануны* ("The

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not draw attention to the relationship of woman's emancipation and man's poor health condition in Belov's works.

<sup>207</sup> In L. Kuznetsova, *Zhenshchina na rabote i doma* (M: Politizdat, 1980), p. 206-207.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

Eves"): "Children rise against their fathers, wives rise against husbands. <...> Woe to such a nation, perish shall such a country and such a nation..." ("Дети встают против отцов, жены против мужей. <...> Горе такому народу, гибель такой стране и нации...")<sup>210</sup>

At the same time unofficial nationalist thought was finding the concept of equality indigestible as well. Gennadii Shimanov published an article "O ravenstve i neravenstve v brake" ("On equality and inequality in marriage") in an influential nationalist journal *Земля*, where he argued that equality between sexes was a largely misconceived notion that contradicted religious foundations of marriage.<sup>211</sup> Equality was argued to be a false aim, since certain systems of relationships could only function within a hierarchy: just as man was not the equal of God, and just as children were not the equals of their parents, women and men were never meant to be equal. Inequality was the most indispensable condition of love,<sup>212</sup> while the outward equality was depriving the sacred matrimony of the trust inherent in the voluntary submission (of the wife). The author attempts a neutral tone suggesting mutuality, but the Russian language with its gender flexions is not a good ally in the matter. This one-sidedness of the argument does not discourage its author, because "in free obeying there is a true freedom, inaccessible for those who argue, as well as the mystery of love, inaccessible for those who prize their superficial freedom most of all..." ("в свободном повиновении есть и подлинная свобода, недоступная для препирающихся, и тайна любви, недоступная для ставящих выше всего свою поверхностную

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<sup>209</sup> Yu.Solobdkin, "Ostorozhno: razvod", *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, August, 9, 1980, p. 2.

<sup>210</sup> A. Strelyanyi, p. 57.

<sup>211</sup> G.M.Shimanov, "O ravenstve i neravenstve v brake". AS No 2060, pp. 16-19.

<sup>212</sup> "NERAVENSTVO EST' SAMOE NEPREMENNOE USLOVIE LYUBVI" - capitals in the original text. Ibid, p.16

свободу..."<sup>213</sup> Shimanov's argument rests on semi-theological foundations, which gave rise to the re-assertion of sacred inequality, which the author continued to preach well into the 1990s.<sup>214</sup> However, the dissident author of the 1970s, Gennadii Shimanov expressed a contemporary official concern, i.e. the problem of changing femininity and masculinity under the conditions of women's emancipation. He argued that striving for equality between sexes resulted in an "unnatural situation", whereby the spiritual specificity of the female was eliminated, since her dignity did not come from "the asexual and vacant outward equality, which castrates the husband spiritually and disgraces the marriage by the inevitable struggle between spouses, but from... the free submission to the husband." Such submission was said to be ennobled by "the erotic truth" which permeated it. The lack of that erotic truth, Shimanov claimed, was characteristic of the modern marriage and was turning both spouses into spiritual hermaphrodites.<sup>215</sup> In this belief Shimanov came close to N.Berdyaev's views on the emancipation movement and at the same time re-articulated the anxiety of the Soviet demographers about the deformation of the modern gender identities and its adverse effect on the family and reproduction.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid, p.18.

<sup>214</sup> Thus, as late as 1994, for instance, Shimanov published an article in another, now legal, nationalist publication *Veche*, in which he stated that apart from the submission to the husband is based on two sets of reasons. Firstly, "it is dictated by love" and sacrifice, and, secondly, it is simply in women's interests to obey men for the mere fact that female nature was "more chaotic and impressionable, more plastic and less organized" and therefore would benefit from guidance. Finally, to win the reader (obviously, not a female one), Shimanov yet again resorts to the parallel relationship between the child and the parent:

"It is similar to the process when the child's little reason united with the parent's reason, does not fade away, but develops favourably...In the same way does the women's sensibility feel confident when it realizes the organized force over itself that restrains and directs it." ("Это подобно тому, как детский ум в единстве с умом родительским не увядает, но развивается особенно благодатно...Женское разумение чувствует себя уверенно, когда сознает над собою организованную сдерживающую и направляющую силу"). G. Shimanov, "Bol'shie bedy 'maloi tserkvi' ", *Veche*, 16, 1994, p.15.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

Although I will argue below that the work of Tatyana Goricheva (the founding member of *Maria* and *Woman and Russia*) is largely related to the nationalist religious discourse of the unofficial circles, I will also point to her statements similar to those voiced by the official authorities on women and family.

## Chapter VI. *WOMAN AND RUSSIA* AND *MARIA*: BETWEEN FEMINISM AND NATIONALISM.

The dissident movement in Leningrad differed significantly from that in Moscow in its emphasis on cultural over political concerns. It acquired the name 'the second culture', which suggested an attempt to create a cultural community parallel to if not alternative to the official one. The second culture reached its peak by the middle of the 1970s when the unofficial circles announced a national religious Renaissance and accepted the missionary burden of bringing it to the broad masses of the Russian people. One of the objective reasons for the existence of the second culture in Leningrad was the over-production of humanities specialists by the higher education institutions in the city with very limited opportunities for employment. Involvement with the alternative culture helped many writers find an audience; the second culture also offered symbolic rewards as it heralded the quest for Truth long abandoned by the Soviet ideology. Although both the dissident movement and the second culture were in opposition to the regime and often overlapped, these were also often seen as different social forces with different aims and concerns. There were considerable differences between dissidents and the second culture members in terms of their communication, which were related to the lifestyle differences: thus, dissidents had a more party-like, often hierarchical communication, whereas those of a more Bohemian disposition, organized their discussions around the privately held *tussovki* (parties in flats).

In the autumn of 1979 ten copies of the almanac *Woman and Russia* started to circulate among the reading audience for Leningrad samizdat (type-written, hand-circulated publications). The articles featured in *Woman and Russia*, which described itself as a feminist journal, presented a wide range of themes from women's life in the

USSR. These included themes familiar to everyone, such as time-consuming queuing, and also themes that had long been taboo. But whatever their authors wrote about - from the chores of women's everyday lives, to the existence of lesbianism in female prisons and the experiences of women in Soviet abortion clinics – they all gave voice to a sense of urgency and despair that proved hard to deal with. Probably best prepared for this explosion of female consciousness were the Western feminists who swiftly published parts of the journal in a Paris newspaper *Humanite Dimanche* already in December 1979.

Following the general policy of the Brezhnev era, the KGB initiated persecution as a response to the groups' growing publicity in the West, eager to clear Leningrad of troublemakers before the Olympic games. However, no matter how obstinate the KGB's intrusion was, it was certainly more expected, and even perhaps less discouraging, than the negative reactions that followed from the dissidents.<sup>216</sup> The response of the second culture was more favourable, although still mixed.<sup>217</sup> It has been noted that most of the authors of *Woman and Russia* failed to find self-expression not only in official but also in unofficial culture, where their work was also dismissed as lacking professionalism (the exceptions were Tat'yana Goricheva, Yulia Voznesenskaya and Elena Shvarts).<sup>218</sup> According to T.Mamonova, underestimation of female achievement was no less rampant in the circles of the second culture than it was in the official circles.<sup>219</sup> The most severe criticism the authors received in private conversations was from female dissidents, as increasing interest of the Western commentators and persecutions of the KGB provided the necessary legitimacy in the

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<sup>216</sup> G. Grigor'eva, , "K istorii zhenskogo dvizheniya vos'midesyatykh godov", in V. Dolinin, B.Ivanov, p. 122.

<sup>217</sup> T.Mamonova, AS 300/85/19/17.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> G.Grigor'eva, p.120.

eyes of the male dissenters. The most obvious problem many dissidents found with *Woman and Russia* was its seeming emphasis on petty issues of failing social infrastructure in the Soviet Union: in their opinion, this was a time when the focus of effort and attention should have been impending global spiritual catastrophe in the degenerating atheist state. According to Voznesenskaya, it was the female dissidents' belief that women's problems were private and personal, that provoked irritation in the dissident movement:

"Our female democrats often denounced their female nature, recasting themselves as complete copies of their male counterparts, inexorable revolutionaries, deprived of even the moral right to personal life."

("...Наши демократки зачастую отбрасывали...и свою женскую природу, перестраивая себя по образу и подобию мужчины в этакое негибкое революционера, лишённого даже и морального права на личную жизнь.")<sup>220</sup>

Apart from the far too familiar tendency of political movements to subsume women's rights under the umbrella of universal notions, the reason for confusion was the feminist allegiance of the journal. This feminist commitment was soon itself to be called into question, however, as the authors felt a need to redefine their brand of feminism, under pressure from Western commentators' interest in their work. Almost immediately after the first issue a split occurred that resulted in two groups, *Woman and Russia* and *Maria*. In a sense, the women behind the initial collection of articles had never been a single group and the split had been inevitable from the start, since the Christian majority who sought to pursue the creation of a women's community in accordance with Orthodox teaching countered Tat'yana Mamonova's interest in Western feminism. Natal'ya Mal'tseva supported Mamonova as they continued working towards the second issue of *Woman and Russia*. The religious part of the group founded the club *Maria* and began publishing their own journal under the same

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<sup>220</sup>Voznesenskaya, p. 42.

name – members of the group included Tatyana Goricheva, Galina Grigor'eva, and Natal'ya Malakhovskaya.

According to Voznesenskaya, Mamonova suggested *Woman and Russia* should operate within the Western feminist framework and be published in the West." That embarrassed us and seemed out of the question given the tragic conditions of life in the Soviet Union." ("...Eto smushchalo i kazalos' nesar'yoznym v tragicheskikh usloviyakh nashei strany.")<sup>221</sup> Already this statement implicitly demonstrates that it was an essential conviction of the incompatibility of Western and Russian women's experiences that triggered the search for a feminism specific to Russia. It was also close contact with the Russian reality that, in Voznesenskaya's view, distinguished Goricheva's position from Mamonova's. Thus, *Maria* provided a forum for the "new Russian feminism", even if it largely avoided defining it. Since its starting point was the denouncement of the Western feminism, *Maria*'s definitions of its own brand of thought were inevitably articulated in negative relation to the Western feminism. The central ideas appear to be those of disbelief in egalitarianism, denouncement of Marxism, as well as the assertion of the need to build a female sisterhood, based on the ideal of *sobornost'*.<sup>222</sup>

The Maria group as oppositional to men, as an ideology that sought its fulfilment in conflict with men, identified implicitly Western feminism. This position becomes clear in a reluctant acknowledgement of the validity of such an orientation in Voznesenskaya's article, where this standpoint is also suggested as non-Russian:

"Russia is huge and the Soviet empire – even more so. In the large cities and the [republic] capitals there are many women striving to break out of the tortuous boundaries of sordid existence through a conflict with the opposite sex, who see the resolution of women's problem only in the resolution of this conflict."

("Россия велика, а советская империя еще больше. В крупных городах и столицах есть много женщин, стремящихся вырваться из мучительных рамок убогого бытия через конфликт с противоположным полом и только в разрешении этого конфликта видящих решение женской проблемы.")<sup>223</sup>

This position was seen as non-Russian; if it occasionally succeeded in finding adherents in the Russian context, it was because "in certain social circles, already living according to Western standards, this orientation appears quite justified and viable." ("В определенных социальных кругах, уже живущих по западным меркам, эта ориентация кажется вполне оправданной и жизнеспособной.")<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> *Sobornost'* was one of the notions central to the Slavophile thought, suggested as the type of social organization that would ensure the moral and spiritual as well as economic health of the rural community.

<sup>223</sup> Voznesenskaya, p. 42.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.



That meant, that feminism could only find favour with the Westernized intelligentsia, and not in the broad public the dissidents intended to reach.

There was a fear that the radical feminism creeping into the Russian society would bring about the destruction of important eternal values. Although Voznesenskaya does not elaborate on the nature of the values in jeopardy, from *Maria's* materials one can infer these to be the family and women's sacrificial role in it.<sup>225</sup> The members of the religious group *Maria* replaced the "feminist" allegiance of the journal for "women's solidarity" and referred to feminism only to disengage themselves from its Western trend, which, in *Maria's* members' opinion, was "atheist, authoritarian and extremist, with a tendency towards fascism".<sup>226</sup> (As is well-known to everyone who lived in the Soviet Union after the Second World War, many of negative phenomena went under the name of "fascism" whether they had anything to do with historical fascism or not; the name itself became one of the most powerful invective terms and was relentlessly overused.) The first event in *Maria*, the club's, activity was a discussion of Marxism and its potential for the feminist thought. In an interview, *Maria* members agreed that they had limited knowledge of Western feminism, but they implied they believed it was largely an extension of Marxist doctrine.<sup>227</sup> As the result of *Maria's* discussion, the view was unanimously adopted that Russian feminism could not appropriate Marxism as its basis, as allegedly, Western feminism had. This supports the larger view of Soviet unofficial circles, which saw Marxism as a primarily atheist, internationalist, and oppressive ideology, rather than as a theory exposing the socio-economic mechanisms of oppression. Marxism, *Maria* members believed, was a pragmatic and cynical ideology that was

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<sup>225</sup> Lack of emphasis on these was one of the main charges against Western feminism. See, for instance, "Femmes de Leningrad" in *L'Alternative* no.6 Septembre-Octobre 1980.

committed to the oppression of the human being.<sup>228</sup> Feminism was the opposite of Marxism, this "disease of the mind".<sup>229</sup> Even if abstracted from the Soviet experience, Marxism was understood as suggesting but one way of social change, that of revolution. Revolution was probably the least popular idea in the circles of intellectuals that the Maria members had come from. At the same time, Maria members thought that no external reformation at all, political or social, would produce change in the situation of women. Transformation had to be religious, and metamorphosis spiritual, for changes to be successful. This refusal to rely on social or political transformation is especially prominent in the direct and implicit criticism of Soviet emancipation by Maria members. Emancipation was traced back to the much ridiculed Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*, a text that was compulsory reading in the secondary school in the Soviet period, with the ideal of the radical social woman seen as continuing into the "forced egalitarianism" of the 1920s, with the ultimate result of the destruction of the family.

Significantly, Maria from its inception got greater support than Woman and Russia, for a number of reasons. Firstly, it involved women who had been active in the dissident movement for at least five years by 1980, the most famous of whom were Yulia Voznesenskaya and Tatyana Goricheva. Voznesenskaya had by that time already served two years in labour camps and Goricheva had headed the Leningrad religious-philosophical seminar. Besides, the themes of the journal were steadily merging with the ideas of the leaders of the religious intelligentsia. This situated Maria as a Russian nationalist publication building its ideology on the figure of the Russian Female Martyr now depicted as the average Soviet woman.

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<sup>226</sup> "Femmes de Leningrad" in *L'Alternative* no.6, Septembre-Octobre 1980.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

It is not surprising in this context that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn rushed to note the positive difference of Maria from "Western superficial feminism".<sup>230</sup> Tatyana Mamonova, in her turn, was eager to point out that Woman and Russia got a very positive response from Andrei Sakharov.

Thus, the divide between the two groups reflected the divide between the broader intellectual contexts within dissent, those of liberalism and religious nationalism. The former was characterized by the belief that the political forms guaranteeing civil liberties were as appropriate for Russia as for any other nation. The Russian religious dissenters or neo-Slavophiles devoted themselves to the religious national revival that, they believed, Russian society had been undergoing since the 1970s and that had a great world-salvaging mission. As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, the most significant forum for the articulation of the ideas related to the national revival in Leningrad was the religious-philosophical seminar that published its own journal, 37. A logical outcome of Maria's affinity to this group was the stress on community understood as an alternative to the democrats' belief in political change. Members of the religious-philosophical seminar stressed that even work at the journal was "a community enterprise" (*соборное дело*), and that the journal should be the voice of the group rather than the reflection of a concept:

"In Russia it was journals that often produced self-consciousness ...[The journal is] an objectification of the self-consciousness of a certain environment...The journal is important exactly because it is a communal enterprise. The journal manifests the necessity of a shared statement."

("В России самопознание разрабатывалось именно в журналах...[Журнал есть] ...объективация самосознания определенной среды...Журнал важен именно в том смысле, что это есть соборное дело. Журнал есть выражение потребности в общем совместном высказывании.")<sup>231</sup>

The idea of a journal as the voice of the community rather than of an editorial

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> AS 300/85/19/17

collective together with the attempt at creating a specifically female community, were central to the concept of the club *Maria*. Community with no explicit leadership, in Voznesenskaya's view, was not only beneficial for the spirit of sisterhood, but also less vulnerable to the persecutions of the KGB, who usually targeted the leaders of a group in their persecution.<sup>232</sup> Repelled by the strict hierarchical structure of the officialdom in the Soviet Union, members of the second culture saw the community type of relationships as a way of escaping from similarities with the communist party (*partiinnost'*) in their organizational structure.

The idea that a female community as opposed to mixed or all-male groups was especially removed from leadership suggests the vision of a woman disinterested in social competition and promotion. Instead of competition, there was what *Maria* members called "a shared understanding of women's responsibilities", which came to embrace both domestic duties and broader messianic designs, namely a sense responsibility for the "world's fate".<sup>233</sup>

Retrospectively, the concept of the journal was defined by one of its active authors as an active reflection upon one's condition as a modern Christian woman. ("активное осознание своего положения современной женщины-христианки.")<sup>234</sup>

While *Maria* shared the male dissidents' concerns with the religious-national revival and the social and nationalist ideas of late Slavophile thought, *Maria* authors, citing thinkers from the same period, emphasized different themes: they cited above all ideas related to the relationship of creativity and sexuality. The national idea came

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<sup>231</sup> VI. Poresh, "My stoim u poroga novogo vremeni" in *Vol'noe slovo*, 39 (1981), p. 41.

<sup>232</sup> Yu. Voznesenskaya, p. 43.

<sup>233</sup> "Femmes de Leningrad".

<sup>234</sup> G. Grigor'eva, p. 123.

into the foreground inasmuch as it was inseparable from the Russian Orthodox teaching, as opposed to being debated in its own right.

To postulate a relationship between the religious philosophical revival of the beginning of the century and feminism may appear far-fetched. Indeed, the new religious consciousness of the turn of the century, rooted in Vl. Solov'ev's concepts of Sophia and Godmanhood, as well as in his theory of spiritual perfection and exemplified by N. Berdyaev, Dm. Merezhkovsky and Z. Gippius, was quite removed from the discussions of the woman question. Feminism was dismissed by Berdyaev as the implementation of hermaphroditism, a dangerous travesty of the sacred androgyny.<sup>235</sup> However, Goricheva's insistence on the revelations that Orthodox religious thought had offered into the mystery of female sexuality as well as its mission suggests the direct influence of Berdyaev's thought. I will now concentrate on Berdyaev's work and compare it with ideas drawn from Goricheva's articles, so as to show the most important instances of Berdyaev's influence on Goricheva's articulation of the women's mission in mystical rather than social terms. Dissidents' interest in the religious search of their predecessors was rooted in their belief that "socialism was not an economic or political doctrine but primarily an atheistic philosophy of life."<sup>236</sup>

Goricheva, inspired by Berdyaev, extended this view to embrace the relations of sexes in the contemporary Soviet society. In her view, the Soviet culture erased sexual polarity under the guise of equality and thus perverted the roles and functions of femininity and masculinity. The problem of Soviet culture, according to her, was the promulgation of a sexless species, *homo soveticus*. This process made men effeminate and shifted both spiritual and economic responsibilities to the woman:

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<sup>235</sup> N. Berdyaev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 238.

<sup>236</sup> A. B. Mlikotin, 201.

"In the society like ours man cannot be independent, cannot be responsible for his actions...Both in the family and in the workplace women are the leading force. In our time, they are forced to be everything, their day is terribly crammed; they are the contemporary martyrs..."

("В обществе, подобном нашему, мужчина не может быть самостоятельным, отвечать за свои действия...И в семье и на производстве женщины - ведущая сила. Они вынуждены в наше время быть всем, их день чудовищно загружен, они-современные мученицы...")<sup>237</sup>

The root of this evil was to be seen in the process of socialization, which, in Goricheva's view, distorted the very human nature, which is implicitly shown as gendered:

"Human strength and gift acquire a perverted direction, the very human nature gets distorted. Crude immorality of the dominant values creates a one-dimensional person without any qualities, a sexless 'homo soveticus'."

(Силы и способности человека получают извращенное направление, искажается сама человеческая природа. Грубая бездуховность господствующих ценностей создаст одномерного человека без свойств, бесполого "homo soveticus").<sup>238</sup>

Goricheva attacked the Soviet education for its attempt to impose a pseudo-masculine set of values: "The entire Soviet education is oriented at the abstract and one-sided "pseudo-masculine ideal of personality" ("Все советское воспитание ориентировано на абстрактно-односторонний 'псевдо-мужской идеал личности')."<sup>239</sup>

What Soviet education failed to instill in women were, according to Goricheva, missionary service to the people, a sense of responsibility for the preservation of the world, which she presents as spiritual privileges. Involuntarily Goricheva comes close to the assertions on the woman's vocation that started surfacing in the anxiety of the Soviet officialdom with the decomposition of the family in the 1970s. Demographic anxiety related to the economic necessity for the women to work full-time and the consequent steady decline of the birth rate in the Soviet Union thus originated both in the official press and underground feminism.

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<sup>237</sup> T. Goricheva, "Raduisya, slyoz Evinykh izbavlenie" in *Vol'noe slovo*, 38 (1980), p. 30.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

These were also the concerns of the dissident nationalists, which, in their rhetoric, were often related to the decomposition of the traditional rural life, and who were also stressing the fact that the birth growth in the Soviet Union mostly occurred due to high birth rates in non-Slavic regions.<sup>240</sup>

Following Berdyaev, she criticized social theories including feminism that downplay the importance of femininity and its uniqueness and assert that "woman's way exists as something different from the men's, that it is equal in value to the male way" ("...путь женщины существует и как нечто особое, что он равноценен мужскому пути.")(Goricheva: 29)

That the feminine mission was exemplified by Virgin Mary, as Goricheva argued, "in the Mother of God for the first time we encounter a perfect image of the enlightened corporeal and unconscious element" ("В Богородице впервые в истории человечества мы встречаем совершенную просветленность телесной и бессознательной стихии") (Goricheva: 28), was not an unexpected turn for a female religious thinker. The more striking note is an implicit polemic with Berdyaev's appeal to consecrate the flesh. In Goricheva's opinion, Christianity achieved consecration of flesh. The Mother of God, femininity herself, had shaken off the curse of the feminine and therefore that of sexuality.

The *Maria* members largely supported Goricheva's ideas; for them she remained the spiritual leader after the emigration as well. And although *Maria* as a club was aimed at creating a friendly female community rather than providing a forum for self-expression, its members remained committed to the articulation of a female consciousness based on Russian Orthodoxy and the religious philosophy of the turn of the century. While reflecting the broader intellectual process of dissent, *Maria* worked

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<sup>240</sup> J.B.Dunlop, pp. 94-100.

out an emphatically female worldview, in which the problems of nation and society were seen through the issues of gender and their solution was to be achieved through spiritual self-betterment. In view of this, it appears logical to devote a few words to Goricheva's later exposition of the potential of Christianity for the feminist critique, especially given that in her later writings, Goricheva's theoretical language is more removed from the immediate everyday problems.

Heavy reliance on the women's missionary and messianic role continued to be a feature of Goricheva's writing. Equality was granted women by Christianity but not merely through the fact that Christ liberated everyone, but rather through the idea that women earned their special status: " Christianity was the first to speak of the true equality, it liberated the woman for the first time." ("Христианство заговорило о настоящем равенстве, оно впервые освободило женщину.")<sup>241</sup> Christianity also showed women's spiritual strength and superiority:

"Women followed Christ everywhere, even to the Golgotha. Unlike the apostles, the women of the Gospels did not get frightened, did not run away, did not betray... And in our century the Church is saved by the woman."

("Женщины следовали за Христом повсюду, вплоть до Голгофы. В отличие от апостолов, евангельские женщины не испугались, не разбежались, не предали... И в наше столетие женщиной спасается церковь.")<sup>242</sup>

Even if the desire to elevate women's role as helpers and preservers rather than doers, was a reaction to the devastating results of the Soviet emancipation and to what was perceived as the growing cynical attitude of women toward their role in the family, Goricheva's writing on the woman extended far beyond the social commentary and came to re-conceptualize some of the metaphysical ideas on femininity as well. According to Goricheva, the essence of the woman is in reception as Mother of God's

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<sup>241</sup> T.Goricheva, ed. *Russkaya zhenshchina i pravoslavie*, p. 77.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 77.



reception of the Holy Spirit, and obedience (poslushanie).<sup>243</sup> For Goricheva the Mother of God is not merely a symbol of motherhood, she comes to account for the appearance of the creative personality. N. Berdyaev also believed that the creative personality was born with the coming of Christ. Creativity is the result of the reception of the Divine and, thus, it is the Mother of God, who symbolizes the human creative endeavour, as she was the only human to receive the Divine.

If for Berdyaev it was Christ who overcame the power of clan, Goricheva believes that the women of the Gospel played a crucial role in the process of the creation of a true individual:

"Christ in the Gospel encounters "typical" men – men gather in parties and clans – and atypical, bright, free women...Personality, free and perfect, appeared only in the times of Christ. Not the least role in this was played by women."

("Христос в Евангелии встречается с "типичными" мужчинами - мужчины собираются в партии и кланы - и нетипичными, яркими, свободными женщинами...Личность, свободная и совершенная, появилась только во времена Христа. И не последнюю роль в этом сыграли женщины.")<sup>244</sup>

Despite praising women's role in the Gospel and suggesting women's spiritual strength at this point, and stressing the missionary character of women's responsibility for the souls of the world throughout her writing, Goricheva contradicted this belief elsewhere. When a few months after her expulsion from the Soviet Union she was asked in a German church whether Russian women wanted to be ordained, she admitted that "to a Russian this question sounds mad."<sup>245</sup> Again Western women were implied to have gone too far in their search for equality: "In our churches there is no talk of the problem of earthly equality...Our women treat the priests with reverence, but they also understand the responsibility that every priest has towards God and humanity." Equality was not the question to debate in relation to the Church,

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>245</sup> T. Goricheva, *Talking about God is Dangerous* (SCM Press: London, 1986), p. 94.

for the Church was the one to relieve everyone of inequality and the priest was seen as the spiritual comfort rather than the rival to compete with. The Russian Orthodox Church, she argues, have been the only body that has been concerned with the "woman's question": "Only the Russian clergy solve the deep problems of nurture, unhappy marriages, abortions and alcoholism."<sup>246</sup> The scale of Russian priests' involvement in welfare issues may be debatable, given the earlier references to the clergy's indifference to their believers as well as their collaboration with the state. However, Goricheva believed that although woman's condition was very difficult, it was still incomparable to that of the priest: "Women are of the view that the cross of a priest is harder than the cross of a woman who has no spiritual consecration and that it is easier to be saved if one has a simple insignificant position."<sup>247</sup>

Goricheva adopts Berdyaev's striving to redeem the feminine, which is given a negative appraisal in the former philosopher's work.<sup>248</sup> If Berdyaev never failed to point that the female was immersed in her sexuality and the feeling of love took over the entire of the female,<sup>249</sup> Goricheva, while writing within the same philosophical framework, states that feminine ability to love a quality that played a role in the redemption of human sins: "The essence of the woman is in giving herself generously and in making sacrifice. In an overabundance of love" ("Сущность женщины в одаривании, в щедрой самоотдаче и жертве. В переизбытке любви.")<sup>250</sup>

Goricheva refuses to define the feminine in any of the acceptable terms, which resulted in a resort to the esoteric and a loss of rigour in her argument. The mission of the woman, in Goricheva's opinion, cannot be reduced either to the domestic function

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>248</sup> N. Berdyaev, *Smysl tvorchestva*.

<sup>249</sup> N. Berdyaev, *Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 243.

<sup>250</sup> T. Goricheva, *Talking about God is Dangerous*, p. 78.

or to the outward femininity or to the reproductive function, for "it is cannot be reduced to anything, as is irreducible to anything the final mystery about man." ("He сводится ни к чему, как несводима к чему-то конечная тайна о человеке").<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

## CONCLUSION.

The aims of this work were twofold. Firstly, to examine the history of recurrences of the Eternal Feminine in the Russian 20th century thought and the curious influence it has exerted on the feminist authors, as well as on women remote from feminist ideas but active in the public space. Secondly, it was to answer a major question that haunted the commentators on the only occurrence of unofficial feminist activity under the Soviet regime, i.e. why it was Russian Orthodoxy that acted as the main background for the maturing of the feminist consciousness. Thus, to tackle both it was necessary to examine the reasons for the appeal of metaphysical femininity for the Soviet intelligentsia. The major hypothesis of this work was that the religious ideal of femininity as well as the resurrection of the interest in the philosophy and culture of the Russian fin-de-siecle among the Soviet dissidents was linked to the growing national (-ist) consciousness.

The ideas of Vladimir Solov'ev were analyzed to demonstrate that it was the most influential proponent of the metaphysical femininity in the modern Russia himself who unwittingly set the trend for the confusion of the ideal and real woman. That confusion resulted in the belief that the Eternal Feminine as well as the theological concept of Divine Wisdom, Sophia, could be occasionally rarified, which had a potential for the elevation of the real woman, whereas initially femininity was meant to be a principle instrumental in man's union with God.

Nikolai Berdyaev's postulation of the distinction between the personal and the familial as the driving forces in history was demonstrated to amount to a split of sexuality and by extension of femininity into two opposites: metaphysical and reproductive. Thus, Berdyaev's work on sexuality could be seen as the reaction to the mentioned merging of the ideal and the real woman within Russian Symbolism. The

analysis of Berdyaev's work also revealed the philosopher's criticism of the emancipation movement at the beginning of the twentieth century on the grounds of the latter's attempt to diminish sexual polarity as well as to downplay the mystical vocation of femininity. These findings are of special interest as they prefigure the argument of the dissident feminism against its western counterpart, considered by the Soviet activists to be an outstretch of Marxism.

The section on the female responses to the theories of metaphysical femininity was included to demonstrate earlier reactions to the ideas of the Eternal Feminine by prominent although remote from feminism women. The section highlighted two different standpoints, that of Z. Gippius, the woman engaged in the philosophical discussion on an equal footing with men and that of L. Blok, the wife of a major Symbolist poet, who was temporarily worshipped as the incarnation of the Eternal Feminine and who had to struggle to re-direct the course of her life and reclaim her sensuality. Although not the primary objective of the analysis, the section demonstrates the striking opposition between Gippius' freedom to create the mythology of her own personality and sexuality as the hostess of a literary salon and the near futile attempts made by Blok to shake off the cramping vision of the Beautiful Woman imposed on her by the contemporary literary milieu. The discussion of Gippius' work also reveals an affinity with the ideas of the later thinker T. Goricheva (one of the founding members of both feminist groups that come into the scope of this work) inasmuch as Gippius prefigures an attempt at reconciling female sexuality and its metaphysical status. Blok's example appears useful here as it poses the problem of the incorporation of the Eternal Feminine into the everyday family life. The fact that this question is raised paves the way to the discussion of Goricheva's attempt to rationalise the everyday and women's missionary role in its routine.

The discussion of the resurrection of the nationalist and religious consciousness that Russia underwent in the 1970s was prompted by the hostility that most of the dissident feminists expressed toward Western feminism as well as capitalism in general. It was shown that a nationalist stance dominated dissident thought even more potently than the official discourse where it surfaced mostly in connection with the rapidly changing demographic patterns of the Soviet republics. The rise of the religious and nationalist consciousness was shown to be the major background against which many unofficial circles operated, whether or not the opposition to the Soviet state was a conscious decision of the members. An acute interest in the Slavophile thought as well as the philosophy of Solov'ev, Berdyaev and other thinkers who grappled with the cursed problem of Russia's relationship with the Western culture was obvious. The sympathies of many dissidents were predictably with the Slavophiles, while the contemporary capitalism was criticized as a deteriorating cultural system whose apparent economic prosperity was almost totally ignored.

The examination of the official discourse on the woman question at the end of the 1970s revealed the intense focus of the Soviet social commentators on the demographic situation and thus tacitly confirmed its nationalist bias. Anxieties of the officialdom were centered on the dysfunction of the Soviet marriage that had ceased to fulfill its primary function, i.e. reproduction of the Soviet population. Since the problem was not relevant in the Middle Asian republics, discussions in the periodical press could not but mention, even if rarely, that it was the Russian population that was at issue. Searching for the explanations for rising divorce rates and falling birth rates, various commentators insisted that the core of the problem was the loss of femininity in women. The latter were found to have been driven by the calls for emancipation and neglected their reproductive function.

Finally, the analysis of the themes and ideas expressed by the feminist periodicals *Woman and Russia* and *Maria* demonstrated that the ideal of their authors rested with the elevated status of femininity found in the turn-of-the-century thinkers. However, it became apparent in the course of this analysis that despite the opposition to the Soviet State, the unofficial feminists were voicing concerns to a certain extent similar to the official discourse. This paradoxical situation can be best explained by the assumption that both the official and the dissident authors were part of the same concern with the way the familiar structures were undermined by the deterioration of family values and Russian authentic traditions, as well as by the reassessment of gender roles.

Like the Soviet officialdom that was trying to redirect Soviet woman's ambition toward the female paradise with a happy household instead of an altar, the dissident feminists also lamented the fact that the contemporary woman in the Soviet Union was horribly overburdened and probably had to devote more time to her children. Unlike the Soviet officialdom, Goricheva and other authors saw religion as the proper channel for the expression of femininity culminating in the religious ideal of Mother of God. Goricheva's articulation of the female consciousness was shown to demonstrate a unique attempt at reconciling the metaphysical and the everyday through the use of religious rhetoric. The dissident feminists' strong aversion for what was thought to be 'Western feminism' sheds light on the distaste for it characteristic of the contemporary Russian society. This work discloses the origins of the anti-feminist bias in the century-old prejudice against the suffragist movement, equally potent in the work of the most prominent Russian philosopher, Nikolai Berdyaev and in the work of the most influential dissident feminist, Tatyana Goricheva.

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